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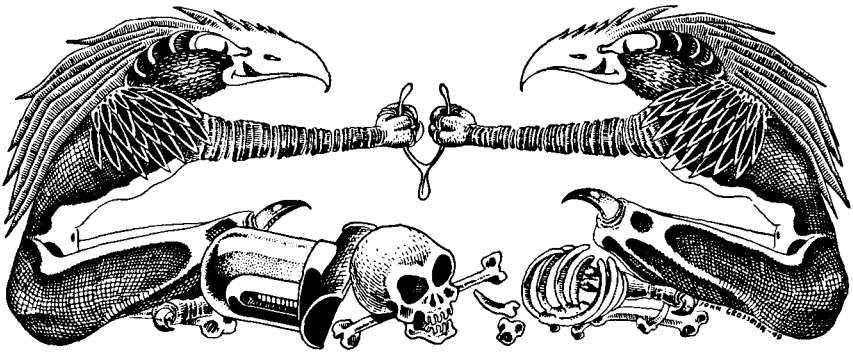

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EDITORIAL

THIS is the first word we have written in sixty-nine days! Tomorrow it will be ten weeks since we took that foolish flop in our basement and wound up totally paralyzed from the diaphragm to the toes. Tomorrow is August 13. Let's call it a red-letter day, because it marks the end of a miracle and the beginning of "another day at the old stand."

Ten weeks ago tomorrow, no less than four doctors, one of them the most eminent orthopedic surgeon in the country, agreed beyond any doubt that your editor, after having been totally paralyzed from the neck up for forty years, would now be paralyzed completely and permanently in the other extremity. They could not have known, of course, that we were editor of OTHER WORLDS, which might account for their mistaken diagnosis. For it is, beyond all doubt, from another world that this miracle has come about. Your editor can't explain it, he is only thankful for the miracle. And he's oh so glad to be back at the helm of his beloved magazine, talking to all his friends, the readers.

Right here and now we want to thank you for all those wonderful letters. Not only from readers of OTHER WORLDS, but from readers of Bill Hamling's FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Bill was so kind as to mention our mishap in his editorial, and his readers flooded us with letters. There must be some way to repay such a wonderful bunch of people! Maybe we can do it by giving OTHER WORLDS everything we can muster to make it a reading treat none of you will ever want to miss. At least, we'll try. We sure owe it to you!

How does it feel to be paralyzed completely, from the gall bladder down? Brother, it's *ghastly*. Dying on the torture racks of the Inquisitors is a happy thing compared to the utter helplessness of paralysis. Even before the dawn to which we were not expected to live, we realized how much better that end would be.

At that, though, we got a chuckle out of the inward remark that "we'd give our right leg to turn back the clock a couple of hours before the accident." We didn't have anything to give! They say that when you've got a leg amputated, you can still feel your toes wiggle when you wiggle 'em. Well, when you're paralyzed, you can't wiggle 'em to feel 'em wiggle even if they'd wiggle when you wiggled 'em! They just ain't there! Which makes it quite a shock when you look down, and there they are! After that, nothing's real anymore. Shortly, however, our sensory nerves began to come back. They say that a woman forgets the agonies of childbirth quickly. We wish we'd been having a baby instead!

We'll skip any more of the details, except to tell you that the next time you see a paraplegic or paralysis victim, look at your own legs and count your blessings. Because, brother, you're in heaven and you don't know it!

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One last thought: there's only one thing worse than paralysis, and that's a television set in the same room! They're devilish! We swear they know you can't get up to adjust 'em, and they do the damndest things!

No wonder the Cubs lose so many ball games — they're playing in the fourth dimension half the time!

Our ten weeks' absence proved one thing, though — it proved that nobody is indispensable. Bea Mahaffey, our managing editor, sure showed us that! She found herself stuck with the entire responsibility of a publishing house with three magazines, and she handled it like a thoroughbred. We owe her a lot we'll never be able to repay. Then there's Associate Editor Marge Budwig, who seems to have a motto strange to your editor: when there's work to be done, get at it and do it! Gad, what a girl! Hustle and bustle all the time.

There's one thing you can't blame the girls for, though, and that's the October issue coming out so late. It seems that somewhere lurking in our office is one of those dad-burned Shaver dero. We'd rather blame that sort of thing for the delay, which would have happened even if we hadn't been laid up in the hospital, because it was work we set in motion before that. However, in fixing up the situation, we've found a way to give you a better OTHER WORLDS. We want to ask you to observe the January issue very carefully when it comes out, and you'll see what we mean. It will be a production job you'll find just about the best in the field. If you've seen the first two issues of IMAGINATION, you'll know what we mean.

And thanks, readers of OTHER WORLDS, for the grand reception you've given our new magazine. Concerning it, we've got some real surprises coming up. We predict that developments of the next year will put the Clark Publishing Company right up there with what you'd call the BIG publishers. We've stolen a march on everybody, and it'll surprise everybody. So watch for the big events to come about!

We're so out of contact with things that we don't even know what's in this issue, but we do recollect that it's a Hannes Bok cover. And if that's correct, then there's one word on the cover you'll say is misspelled. We want to say right now that it isn't. Your editor is an amateur Egyptologist, and he thinks the ancient Egypt was Egupt, and that its real founder was a legendary queen of that name. Beside her, Sheba was a bag of bones and a hank of hair. Someday we'll present her story, in fiction form, written by ourselves! Yeah, you know, Steber, Patton, *et al.*

Reviewing a few accomplishments we're proud of since starting OTHER WORLDS: (1) The return to active writing of Charles R. Tanner. We've finally convinced the old master of the Tumithak stories he's still of stellar calibre. You'll see many of his stories in the future. (2) Getting David H. Keller to write his speech of the Bellfontaine regional convention in story form. You'll see it soon, and it'll thrill you just as it did the convention. (3) Proving that science fiction editors are friends, not competitors. We want to salute Sam Merwin, Bill Hamling, Howard Browne, Jerome Bixby especially. Nice guys, all of them. Keep reading their mags and see!—*Rap*

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BUBASTIS OF EGUPT

By CRAIG BROWNING

A runaway girl from an alien world, Bubastis rose from slavery to a position of power that she might bring destruction to her enemies.

THE emerald-green pupils of her large dark-rimmed eyes relaxed suddenly into narrow vertical slits. The planet's surface had emerged briefly through the sea of clouds only to be wiped out by an errant streamer of white mist. It then appeared again, clear and unobstructed, less than a thousand feet below.

The relief Bubastis felt was not due so much to her safe descent from open space, but the endless succession of giant sandstone statues or monuments that trailed from horizon to horizon in single file could indicate nothing less than the existence of an intelligent race.

The monuments, varicolored and enhanced by pigmented ornamentation, were reminiscent of highway signs advertising manufactured products. However, these depicted semi-Atlantian shapes that were possibly patterned after living creatures, and geometric shapes that probably conveyed symbolic meanings.

Her elephantine pointed ears fanned out in interest as she levelled off and guided her ship along this row. She skimmed along the ground and at times almost scooped up clumps of the bright red vegetation in the intake of the underjet.

A heavy, slurred voice broke into the silence of the small cabin. Her contentedly slitted pupils widened to round pools of alarm.

"Don't land, Bubastis. If you do I'll be forced to take you back to Atlantis in my own plane with its Jovian gravity potential that will keep you flattened."

She hastily searched the skies sternward until she saw the larger ship, trailing ten miles behind.

"I am going to land, Zhuti," she said, her voice melodiously soprano and calm. "If you so much as touch me, your reward from your master, my father, will be death."

"It would be death anyway, Bubastis. To a Jovian eunuch who has once beheld your beauty as I have, death is a welcome vacation from the meaninglessness of life, whose only meaning lies in the curve of your limbs."

"True," Bubastis said calmly, her lips quirking into a smile, her eyes slitting in pleasure, "but there is life on this globe. Retreat beyond the atmosphere and wait for me there in a closed orbit. Allow me to sample the pleasures this planet must afford. I will join you in a year or two. As

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a reward, I will permit you to hold me unclothed, feel my warmth and life, suffer the pleasure-agony of total frustration which is all you can ever experience of sex. Then, I will return to Atlantis, with no one the wiser concerning my escapade."

"No!" Zhuti's voice was an agonized protest. "I am a sexless eunuch. My loyalty to my master, your father, is the only satisfying purpose to my existence, so I must make you come back if you won't do so willingly."

"Below are some natives," Bubastis said in quick excitement. "I'm going to land and throw myself on their mercies. Maybe they will kill you and end your unhappy existence."

Along the row of monuments was a slowly moving train of humped pack-animals loaded with swaying, balanced loads. Keeping pace with the animals were smaller creatures who conformed roughly to the universal human shape. Whether large as a Jovian or small as she, Bubastis could not tell.

She shut off the underjet and dipped upward slightly so as not to frighten the caravan and landed a few hundred yards ahead of them. Her ship came to rest between two monuments, one of a bloated caricature of human form, the other a symbolic form atop a giant base.

The panel instruments had already indicated breathable atmosphere and tolerable atmospheric pressure.

With a woman's secret smile she hastily divested herself of all clothing except a clinging rayon undergarment, whose semi-transparency accentuated rather than concealed what it covered. Her brief closeup glimpse of the humanoidal creatures of the caravan had shown them to be quite like her, though without her own gracefully large ears. The appeal of her body would instantly make them her allies against the Jovian.

She slid open the exit hatch and leaped to the smooth red sward, her legs buckling momentarily under the greater gravitation to which she was unaccustomed. She straightened and started toward the caravan which had come to a halt undecided whether to turn and flee from possible danger or to advance.

Zhuti had landed his ship to one side, overshooting his mark. He was already climbing out of the hatch. He had his heavy leaded sandals strapped to his giant feet to enable him to walk and a plastic case over his head to provide the enormous air-pressure his lungs demanded. The native planet of his ancestors had a gravity potential and atmospheric pressure many times that of Atlantis and this planet, and his body had not been weaned to other conditions.

Calling in shrill alarm and appeal, Bubastis raced toward the halted caravan. Zhuti sped to cut her off. With a sinking feeling she saw that he would succeed.

Suddenly the natives were springing into motion. On foot and on the tall ungainly humped creatures they raced toward the point of convergence.

Suddenly Bubastis felt a heavy hand close around her arm, its fingers each as large around as her wrist.

"Got you!" Zhuti muttered. "Now

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let's run quickly without struggle or these savage natives will be upon us and kill us both."

"Are they then different than other species of man?" Bubastis mocked. "It is you they will kill, and in so doing set you free of your distasteful existence."

Zhuti recognized the trap Bubastis had deliberately created for him. He saw now the purpose of her almost total disrobement, but he saw too late. The humped animals and their riders were upon him. Grotesquely shaped blades of metal became flashes of copperish motion. The hot stench of the animals was sucked into the compresso that supplied the air within his helmet. The equally hot touch of metal cutting into his flesh blended with it as his senses numbed at the imminence of death.

The strength of life drained from his grasping fingers. His vision filmed over with the image of Bubastis, an expression of pleased triumph on her elfin face, as she slipped free. Numb protest against fate flooded his heart, to be drowned out by the pain of its accelerated pumping as it became air-locked. . . . .

The two men, whose swords still dripped with the brown blood of the Jovian, dropped lightly from their camel steeds, each eager to claim the reward of escorting Bubastis to the caravan.

Bubastis quickly studied them. Both were well built, even according to the standards of Atlantis. One, apparently older than the other, sported a heavy black beard, while the other was beardless, strong chinned and rather handsome in spite of his ears which were as small as those of a Jovian.

The two glared at each other, then turned to her with smiles, bowing low from the waist. Each spoke, ignoring the fact that the other was speaking. Their tongue was of course strange, though its separate sounds were decipherable. It was a language she could learn quickly.

They continued in their bowing posture, darting each other baleful glances. Bubastis realized they were waiting for her to choose between them.

Her laughter was the sound of tinkling glass as she stepped to the beardless one and laid her hand on his shoulder. He instantly dropped to his knees, bending his head until his lips touched one of her feet. Then he rose. When standing erect, his height was only a little more than her own.

She saw in his face his attraction toward her body, his fear of her eyes and the strangeness of her ears. She sensed that it was a delicate moment, that his fear might grow stronger than his desire.

Quickly she went to him and rested her sheathed fingers on his shoulders, pressing against him and arching back until her thinly covered breasts lightly touched his sweating chest. The thin cloth that covered her became damp and clung to her with revealing enhanced coloring.

"You win, Settith," the bearded man growled.

Bubastis sensed the meaning of the strange words. She turned her head

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and saw the man grab the hump of the camel and leap to its back. Then Settith leaped to the back of his own animal, guided it to her and reached down, circling her slim waist with a strong arm and drawing her up beside him.

"What's your name, cat girl?" Settith asked.

Bubastis did not understand his words but laughed gleefully.

"I don't know what you say, but I love it," she sang.

"She speaks a strange tongue, Hobar," Settith called to the bearded man, whose camel loped beside them.

"I expected she would, Settith," Hobar answered gruffly. "If she's human she must be of a race so distant from these lands that it has never been heard of before. I'll wager my freedom against yours that she is sired by one of the great cats of the southlands out of some captured village woman."

"If that's possible you may be right, Hobar," Settith replied. "More likely though is the possibility that a spell has been placed on her by the priests of some evil cult, or even that monster we slew."

The camels were loping in a smooth rolling gait. Bubastis swung her legs over the back of the camel behind Settith, careful to keep her fingers sheathed as she clung to Settith. The feel of his strong body sent thrills through her. Impulsively she bit at his neck, careful that her sharp teeth didn't pierce the skin. She felt his breathing quicken and knew that she had won an ally.

With that she turned her eyes to the bearded one who was riding as close as he dared, his eyes feasting on her in frank desire. She studied the firm muscular build of his body. Her eyes met his and held, answering the passion in them with invitation and promise. All the more potent, she was beginning to sense, because her eyes were animal to him.

Her lips opened in a slow smile. She veiled her eyes, studying the man called Hobar calculatingly. His nostrils were flaring rapidly from emotion.

She turned her gaze away, biting at Settith's ear in animal playfulness.

"Maybe you two will fight over me," she whispered in Settith's ear, knowing he could not understand her words.

The people of the caravan were crowded together, watching as the camels and their riders drew up. In the foreground, alone, tall and straight, with a neatly trimmed iron gray beard and piercing blue eyes under overhanging brows, stood a man who bore the stamp of leadership.

Bubastis felt her first misgivings as Settith reined his camel in front of this man. As he slid off the beast's back, taking her with him, she sensed a change from the self sufficiency he had displayed. A quick glance at Hobar disclosed the same subtle change. It was almost that of a slave toward a master, though not quite.

In the exchange taking place in the strange native tongue she gathered that the gray-beard's name was Abrah. From the tones, the vehement manner of Settith, the angry tone of

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Hobar, the firm authority of Abrah, she began to feel that things might not go well with her.

The gray-beard turned his head, calling sharply.

"Medinah!"

A woman showing signs of age stepped forward from the wall of faces. She stopped beside Abrah, An orange cloak hid her figure, even her arms, so that only her hands and her face were exposed.

"What do you make of this creature, Medinah?" Abrah asked.

"But for her ears she would be a fitting gift for the Pharaoh," Medinah said. "They are the ears of a bewitched person. Of that I am sure."

"I agree," Abrah said, pulling thoughtfully at his beard. "Even the way she came was not natural. Yet she has obviously thrown herself upon our mercies. We can't send her away. Namo! Bemo!"

Two muscular Nubians jumped forward, dropping to their knees and bowing low.

"You will serve this bewitched creature," Abrah said. "Satisfy her slightest whim, but do not let her escape. At the next village we will seek out a physician and have her ears trimmed before continuing our journey to Memphis." The two Nubian slaves dropped in obeisance before Bubastis. "Settith, get the caravan in motion again, we are a long way from where we camp tonight yet."

Settith glared warningly at Hobar, smiled reassuringly at Bubastis, patted her shoulder lingeringly, then leaped onto his camel, shouting orders.

Namo and Bemo rose to their feet, their teeth flashing. By signs they indicated that Bubastis should follow them. Since everyone else seemed to be going about their business in complete forgetfulness of her presence, she followed the two slaves.

Her keen intelligence and experience with many languages had already enabled her to correctly divine the meanings and usages of quite a number of the words used. She knew that in a few days she would be able to converse with these simple people.

As she followed the two Nubians through the ranks of cud-chewing camels and silent, curious-eyed humans of all races and appearance, she felt a vague uneasiness concerning Abrah, the leader. She had not liked the way he studied her ears as he spoke, nor had she liked the look of fear in the eyes of the woman called Medinah.

By signs the two glistening blacks indicated that she should step into a roofed structure on the back of one of the camels. She pulled aside the heavy drapes that hid the interior and found that the floor was covered with many thicknesses of pillows. Suddenly she was tired. She climbed in and sank down with a sigh of relief.

Instantly the beast swayed upward, rising to its feet. The swaying motion of its walking was soothing.

She parted the drapes slightly. The whole caravan was moving. Namo and Bemo were walking on either side of the camel, talking to each other—evidently about her since their white

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eyes with bright black dots of pupils turned upward often in her direction.

Some of the men paused at the slain body of Zhuti to see it more closely. No one paid the slightest attention to her ship, nor the larger one Zhuti had come in. That could only mean that they knew absolutely nothing about ships or any other type of machines.

"That's good," she decided. "These natives will probably look on the ships as just two more of the many different statues and monuments along this trail, and leave them alone.

At last she let the drapes fall together and lay back, closing her eyes. Soon her breast rose and fell in the deep rhythm of sleep. From her throat rose the soft fluid sound of purring.

"The sun is low in the west, my Settith," Andra said, her large dark eyes studying his profile.

"It is," Settith answered curtly, not looking at her. With his hidden foot he pounded the ribs of the camel, which ignored this signal to hasten.

"Why do you not look at me and smile?" Andra asked sadly. "Is this bewitched creature then so bewitching that she could come between you and all the past?"

"The sky shows promise of rain," Settith said curtly, dropping his hand until it was out of Andra's view, and digging into the camel's hide painfully. The camel twisted its head about and tried to bite him. Taking this as an excuse, Settith beat at its head with his short whip, forcing it into a rolling lope.

He was acutely conscious of Andra's sad eyes following him. He thrust her angrily from his thoughts.

"I'm growing up," he decided. "In my youth, yesterday, I believed the aim of life was to save until I could afford a home so that I could marry Andra. Today that seems childish, so I must be growing mature. Now I see that a girl with fire and spirit is the only desirable mate. Whether she is this bewitched one or another."

A Greek slave on foot overtook him and ran along beside him, nimbly dodging the teeth of the camel.

"Abrah commands your presence, oh master Settith," the slave said respectfully.

Muttering exasperated curses Settith turned his camel and went back along the line to where Abrah sat on the open carriage atop a camel.

"Join me, Settith," Abrah said. "I want to speak with you."

"Yes, uncle," Settith said, masking his feelings.

He maneuvered his steed so that he could leap from it to a seat beside Abrah. The Greek slave paced along beside the riderless camel so it wouldn't wander away.

"I saw how curt you were with Andra," Abrah said. "It brings to my thoughts a feeling I have had at times that you are still too young for the responsibility of marriage."

"Too young?" Settith echoed incredulously. "That brings to my thoughts an old saying that to the aged the adult seem children, and to the centenarian the aged seem as babes with gray beards." He stared straight ahead as he spoke.

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Abrah watched his averted face with amusement. This changed abruptly to firm decision.

"Know then, my nephew," he said, "that this bewitched creature is to be given to Thothmaton, the Pharaoh, for which I should receive great favors in tax leniency and license to trade freely. There will never have been such a gift received at the court of the Pharaoh."

"And if I should have other plans, uncle Abrah?" Settith asked softly.

"You may return to your duties," Abrah said.

"And my rights for having slain the giant?" Settith said woodenly.

"They are no greater than Hobar's," Abrah said. "In fact, as I watched it seemed to me that your blade missed its mark, gathering only blood spurting from the wounds that Hobar had made."

Settith turned to protest, and saw in Abrah's eyes the amused knowledge that it wasn't the truth, but no man would say differently.

He swallowed his protest and leaped to the back of his camel. When he looked back some time later he saw Hobar sitting beside Abrah, deep in conversation.

His gaze went back along the line to the camel beside which strolled Namo and Bemo. Memory of the nearness of the bewitched girl sitting behind him on his camel rose vividly, causing his breath to quicken. There had been promise in her caress, and hints of eternal delights that would never fade.

Decision crystallized. Soon it would be time to make camp for the night. While the others were propitiating the deities whose images marked the trail he could get to her. . . .

The lead camel seemed to be the one to make the decision where to camp. An area where travelers from Ham could spend the night safely was denoted by the pedestal on which was the symbol of the sun, and the massive block symbolizing the eternal nature of the commerce from Ham, the country of Abrah and his caravan. There were many such markers along the trade route. Ham was an even richer country than Egypt, which meant that it was the richest country in all the world; and its traders, such as Abrah, commanded respect.

Settith pretended to be over-concerned as to the disposition of the camp and rode up and down the line, directing slaves as to the places they should unload their beasts and pitch their tents.

Singly and in groups the freemen and the women drifted over to the nearest idols to lay down their gifts while the slaves busied themselves with the tasks of arranging camp.

Settith waited until Namo and Bemo had pitched tent for Bubastis and escorted her inside. Then casually he reined his camel beside the tent and dropped lightly to the ground.

He glanced around quickly to make sure no one was watching. Parting the flap of the tent he bent to enter.

There was a brief flash of the bewitched girl astride the reclining form of a man, then that man leaped up to face him while Bubastis was flung

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to one side, a plaintive mewing noise welling from her throat.

"Hobar!" Settith exploded, drawing his blade. He saw Hobar's sheathed blade in a far corner of the tent with a pile of clothing. He stepped forward, intending to kill Hobar.

"Wait, you meddling fool, "Hobar said sharply. "If we settle this here we'll both lose and guards will be placed around her. Either we share her or we must decide this after dark some distance from the camp."

"If I kill you now," Settith sneered, "the evidence will support my statement that I caught you here, as I have."

Bubastis rose timidly to her feet, studying the expressions of both men, trying to guess at the meanings of their words. Suddenly she ran to Settith, flinging her arms around his neck, clinging to him.

The call of her fully awakened desires was strong and unashamed. For a brief second Settith forgot Hobar, and in that second Hobar gained his sword and leaped toward him, insanity glaring from his eyes.

Once again Bubastis was flung to one side, this time landing on her feet, her green eyes large and round with the lust for the sight of blood.

Settith was less experienced. Moreover his movements were hampered from having had to get Bubastis out of the way. In that first instant of battle he felt the hot touch of Hobar's blade sear across his midsection.

Desperation made him lunge without desire to cover himself. He saw his blade bury itself diagonally in Hobar's neck in a hatchet-like movement, not stopping until it had cut in nearly to the heart.

The violence of the blow completed the rupture that Hobar's blade had begun. The pain drained all strength from him. His fingers slipped from his sword. He fell on the pillow of his own disembowelment, while Hobar, his eyes glazed over in death, fell on him while trying to get out of the tent.

When they were found, Bubastis was crouched in the far corner of the tent, her eyes greenly luminous in the gloom, her elephantine ears laid back, her red tongue licking equally red lips through white gleaming teeth.

Those who entered first thought she was paralyzed with fright. Sensing the thoughts behind their pitying glances in her direction, she played on them, but it was an effort to refrain from purring. Not in a thousand years had she seen such quick and efficient mercilessness, such violent emotional explosion.

To be sure, she had in one instant lost both her lovers. But, she knew, a race that spawned two such would contain others . . . many, many others.

Abrah stared bitterly down at the two figures sprawled in death. He felt that he was much to blame. Settith his nephew, almost his son in affection, Hobar the son of a close friend, entrusted to his care when he became eighteen and up to now one of his most trusted and reliable men; both cut down so senselessly.

His eyes lifted to Bubastis who still crouched in the corner of the tent wearing her mask of fear and

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misery, waiting to take her cue from whatever moves were to be made.

A hand touched his shoulder. He turned his head. It was Medinah.

"Now when it is too late we see the utter danger of this bewitched creature," Medinah said sadly. "Andra will grieve for many years. It would be better if she were to die without learning."

"Yes," Abrah said heavily. "I must do what I should have done at the start; cage this creature. She's not human, whatever she is. She may be more than human—or less, but in either case. . . ." His voice faded on a futile note.

His eyes came back to the two lying so still in death. A tear welled from his eye. For a moment he struggled with his emotions, his shoulders shaking while Medinah's fingers gripped sympathetically. He gained control of himself and lifted his head. He gave orders for the wrapping of the bodies of Settith and Hobar and the building of a cage to contain Bubastis. He avoided looking at her as he did so, knowing that she could already divine meanings from glances.

As the slaves rushed away to fulfill his orders he stepped across the two bodies. When Bubastis looked up at him he smiled impersonally at her, holding out his hand.

With seeming timidness she reached up and let his fingers wrap around her hand. She stood up slowly and let him lead her from the tent.

With Medinah following a few steps behind he led Bubastis to his own tent. Already his personal servants had laid out the carpet and pillows in preparation for the evening meal. By signs he motioned for Bubastis to be seated.

"You will dine with us, Medinah," he ordered. "If I show indications of falling under some spell you are permitted this once to speak sharply to me."

Medinah smiled feebly to herself and obediently chose a spot to one side where she could watch both Abrah and Bubastis, while they would have to turn their heads to look directly at her.

"Bewitched creature," Abrah said clumsily, "do you as yet understand any of our tongue?"

Bubastis guessed the meaning of his question, hesitated, then decided it would be safer to pretend to be ignorant for the present.

"I think it was so sad they had to die," she said in her own language.

"It is too bad," Abrah said to Medinah. "I can't tell if her sounds are intelligible speech or merely animal noises. If she had exhibited any ability to grasp words, however little, it might have been better to place her with the women and have them teach her. Speech would make her acceptable as a human." His eyes dwelt on her body unemotionally. "It's a shame her mind is not as human as her form. I am inclined more and more to believe she is not bewitched, but the offspring of an unholy mating. That may be the secret of the magnetism from her that would send two such fine men to their deaths."

"Three," Medinah said, "for when I passed the slain giant I looked close-

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ly at his features. Though foreign, they were very kind in an infinitely sad manner. He could not have been other than a good man."

Two Chinese slaves appeared, bearing baskets of foods. There were shelled nuts of many varieties, fruits, and vegetables. Bubastis tasted each tentatively, and those she found agreeable she ate. Abrah watched her with his growing perplexity well hidden.

"Strange," he said to Medinah. "These foods are a cross-section of foods from every part of the world, yet they all seem strange to her. She must be from a *very* far land."

Namo and Bemo the Nubians came trotting up, their black skins glistening with perspiration.

"It is prepared for her, oh master," Namo said, flashing his teeth in a smile at Bubastis.

Abrah looked at Bubastis with desperate earnestness. Suddenly he pointed at his chest and said, "Abrah."

"These men with the deep blue skin interest me very much," Bubastis said, smiling.

Abrah sighed in defeat.

"Take her to the cage," he ordered curtly. "Each of you take an arm and leg so that she will be helpless. I fear she will be more dangerous than her sire when aroused."

Bubastis unsuspectingly watched the two Nubians circle the carpet, approaching her with every sign of deep respect and obeisance.

It was not until they had sprung at her without warning and securely seized her that she realized things were not as she had thought.

For a split second rage distorted her features. Then her intelligence took command. Instead of resisting she watched Abrah as she was carried away. On her face was an expression of helplessness and passive protest.

"You may have done wrongly," Medinah said.

Abrah watched until Bubastis was out of sight.

"I don't know," he said sharply. "A voice whispered to me just now that if I allow her to live it will be the greatest misfortune mankind ever can experience. I will be happy when we reach Memphis and I can present her to the Pharaoh. I'm an old man and take pleasure only in things that are familiar to me."

Bubastis, in her cage, had plenty of time to think things out. The cage was nothing more than the original carriage she had ridden in, with stout bars fastened in place. Escape would have been possible, but there seemed no reason for it at present.

She sensed that the first phase of her entrance into the world of man had ended with the abrupt termination of life of Settith and Hobar. That had been a mistake, perhaps, but the pleasure of her recollections of it was well worth what it may have cost in freedom.

At times she drew back the curtains of her cage to get the sun and to study those who paused to watch her. None of those she saw interested her from the personal angle. In the back of each mind was the stern command of Abrah not to make friends with her or otherwise expose themselves to her

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sorcery.

As the days passed she gained a thorough command of the native languages. There were two in use, as she soon discovered. One was hamitic, the language of the caravan; the other arabic, the language of the many visitors to the caravan as it passed through villages.

Her keen intelligence became absorbed in the task of learning the language and piecing together snatches of conversation that told their story of this civilization.

She learned that she was destined as a gift to the Pharaoh Thothmaton, and that he was the hereditary ruler of this land. She learned that there was a running argument as to whether she was a bewitched creature made to look as she did because of some magic spell, or whether she was a cross between the human and another race of creatures called cats that lived in jungles far to the south. In either case, she gathered, she was considered as something supernatural, able to cast spells on mortals as evidenced by Settith and Hobar killing each other.

The tales about her grew in proportion as the journey continued, and she heard them all because no one suspected she could understand what was said as wide-eyed visitors stared at her in awe, listening to the elaborated tales woven by the slaves of the caravan.

Yet in their growing, she found, the tales always fell far short of the actual truth. No one suspected or dreamed that she might be from another planet for the simple reason that they didn't know that their own land was the surface of a planet! By some strange alchemy of rationalization the ship Bubatis had arrived in, and the one Zhuti had followed her in, were forgotten completely. One version of her arrival was that she had been riding some strange animal which ran away and was never seen again. Another and more popular version was that she had suddenly materialized a short distance from the caravan.

There were other things she discovered that were interesting. The range of color vision of these people was different from hers. They lumped several colors together under the name black. Some of these were actually black, but the skin of the Nubians was a deep blue instead of black. Studying this problem she soon concluded that they could see several shades of color below the red and were blind to several shades in the blues and violets. She also found that the deep red color of the vegetation was actually a green in their visible spectrum instead of the lowest visible color, and that some of the blacks of the sandstone monuments along the path were various shades of orange and red to them.

During the long nights and the long hours of the journey when she was alone in her privacy Bubastis practiced making speech sounds and coordinating what she was learning. When the caravan at last reached the banks of the Nile and made camp preparatory to being ferried across to Memphis which sprawled along the opposite bank from horizon to

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horizon, she had as complete a command of the two languages as any native. Not so much as by a whisper had she let anyone know. She felt the time was not yet ripe for her to reveal her intelligence and origin.

The last glimpse Bubastis had of Abrah was one she would often recall. Against her will she had come to admire this silent man. On his face was deep disappointment as the Pharaoh's servants carried her through a gigantic arch into a warehouse. She knew he had counted on the unusualness of his gift to the Pharaoh being sufficient to grant him an audience with that august personage; but the recorders had done little more than glance at her behind her bars.

There had been something else, too. He had shown a last doubt as to whether he had done the right thing by her. That had shown in his eyes as he watched her being carried away.

Abrah had been much like her own father in personality, if it were possible to compare the Lord of Atlantis with an uncivilized trader on this backward planet, the Earth.

As Abrah became lost to view Bubastis turned her attention to her immediate surroundings. She was in a storeroom of vast proportions, mostly filled with inanimate goods, but also containing other cages, some of which held humans and others containing various creatures.

She studied these non-human creatures with intense interest. They seemed of almost infinite variety, but one creature drew her attention more than all the others. It was a fur covered beast whose hair was the most beautiful shade of violet she had ever seen. That was what first attracted her to it. The creature was asleep when she first saw it.

Perhaps sensing her intent stare, it opened its eyes. She gasped in amazement at those eyes, and perhaps the creature experienced the same shock. It stopped breathing for a long moment, returning her stare with one equally intense. Their eyes were basically identical, even as to coloring.

It seemed to study her for a time, then it seemed to accept her presence as nothing to be particularly alarmed about. It opened its mouth in a wide yawn, stretched its short powerful legs, allowing its claws to emerge from their sheaths and claw absently at the wooden floor of its cage.

That too was a surprise. Its nails were retractable just as hers were.

The creature closed its eyes again drowsily. Bubastis hesitated. Was there still another resemblance, she wondered?

She glanced around. No one was near. The gifts for the Pharaoh coming in now were inanimate and being placed in rows on the far side of the room.

From her throat welled a soft purring sound. Her pupils narrowed to mere slits. The purring welled louder and louder. The creature's small pointed ears pricked up. It had heard. An answering purr, slightly rattling, came from its throat.

It opened its eyes and looked di-

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rectly into hers. In that moment she determined to have this creature for her own. If she took nothing else back to Atlantis with her from this planet she would take it or a creature of the same species. She had heard legends of the existence of creatures allied to her own race in ancestry or parallel evolution, but this was the first one she had ever seen.

"So the trader was right!" a voice spoke behind her. "She was obviously sired by a cat of some kind, and from the color of her hair it may have been a panther."

The man who had spoken wore a short skirt and a loose fitting short coat adorned with jewels. There were others with him, keeping respectfully behind him. Bubastis decided he must be the Pharaoh Thothmaton. Now was the time to speak!

"You are wrong, Pharaoh Thothmaton," she said in his own language. "Perhaps countless ages ago that panther and I had the same ancestors, just as you and the dogs in the streets are of one blood, but I assure you my sire and mother both were of the shape I possess.

"Blasphemy!" several voices gasped, horrified.

Thothmaton's features darkened in rage.

"Beware, unholy creature," he growled.

Bubastis smiled slowly, turning her body with slow grace that revealed its contours to best advantage. The dark anger in the Pharaoh's face softened. He looked deep into her eyes.

"I think," he murmured, "that you will become an excellent pet." His voice took on tones of command. "Reward the merchant from Ham generously with goods and gold, and give him scrolls that will get him back and forth in his journeys without payment of taxes for twelve times twelve days and nights." One of the men hurried away. "See that she is taken to my quarters and placed in a more suitable cage." Another man hurried away.

The Pharaoh had not taken his gaze away while he issued these orders, nor did Bubastis drop her eyes from his frank stare. Instead, she put all the invitation of her sex into her smile and her eyes, noticing his quickened breath with well-concealed amusement and delight.

When he turned away abruptly and continued his tour of inspection of the hundreds of gifts she watched his broad back, a contented smile on her lips.

"If this is the ruler of this planet," she murmured softly in her own tongue, "then will I most easily rule through him." She looked across at the panther speculatively. "Perhaps," she decided dreamily, "when my father sends for me I will be able to successfully defy him . . . given time to prepare. . . ."

Bubastis became aware of low voices talking. She awakened, but did not open her eyes. It had been hours since she was brought into the ornately furnished room in her new cage with metal bars. No one appeared after the slaves left her, so she had fallen asleep.

There were three voices, one which

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she recognized as belonging to the Pharaoh.

"There she is, my sister Selah," Thothmaton was saying. "What do you think of her, Antioch? Part beast, or bewitched human?"

"She would almost appear entirely human," a melodious voice that must belong to Selah spoke. "If her ears were trimmed she could pass as one of another land far away, one we have never heard from before."

"I have seen such as her, though not quite like her," a male voice that must belong to Antioch said. "She's human without question, though bewitched by some unholy priest of a dark cult. My minor priests that do missionary work among the Nubians to the far south report that there are such dark priests there who are able to do evil things almost beyond credulity."

"Prod her to make her wake up," Selah said. "I want to see those eyes that impressed you so strongly and hear her speak."

"Yes, waken her," Antioch said. "I want to question her about her origin and how she came by this strange shape that is a mixture of human and cat. As for those ears, I agree with your sister that they should be trimmed to more pleasing shape."

Bubastis opened her eyes and glared at Antioch and Selah, flinching at the very thought of a knife being touched to the delicate tissue of her ears.

"Now I believe!" Selah exclaimed. "Those eyes could never be faked. She is undoubtedly part cat. Now that I see them the thought occurs to me that perhaps she isn't bewitched, but is herself a mistress of dark evil, having taken this shape because it pleases her." She drew back a step under the fierceness of Bubastis' glare.

Bubastis gained amusement from this sign of fear of her. Her lips parted in a smile of contempt for Selah. Selah, properly interpreting the smile, linked her arm in her brother's and smiled very sweetly at her.

"My brother and husband," she said, "I hope you will see to it that the ears of your new pet are trimmed pleasingly before this evening when I come to your chamber for your pleasure. It will look much more attractive in my estimation."

The thrust went too far for good taste. Bubastis sensed this in the expressions of both Thothmaton and Antioch, and quickly took advantage of it by ignoring it.

"This is the high priest, Pharaoh Thothmaton?" she asked, her words smooth and cultured. She seemed not to notice Selah's flush of defeat, keeping her eyes on Antioch and her expression full of respect.

"Yes," Thothmaton said. "This is Antioch. And your name? I'm very curious to know it."

"I am Bubastis," she said, bowing her head slightly.

"Bubastis," Antioch said, flavoring the syllables of the name. "A strange name. Where are you from?"

"I'm from Atlantis," she said.

"Where is Atlantis?" Thothmaton asked.

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"It's the world next farthest away from the sun than this one," Bubastis said.

"Is it in that direction?" Antioch said, pointing toward the west.

Bubastis did some hasty figuring. It was midmorning. Antioch had pointed in almost the exact direction of the fourth planet.

"Yes," she said, "in that direction."

"Then it must lie across the great sea!" Thothmaton said excitedly.

"Great sea?" Bubastis said. "That word is strange to me, but it's meaning is clear. Yes, across the great sea. It's a large world, though not so large as your own."

"How did you come here, in a ship?" Antioch asked.

"Yes, a ship," Bubastis said. "I was cruising out in the great sea. Suddenly I was set upon by robbers from a world even beyond my own. One of them cut me off from escape to my own land. I had to flee here."

"Pharaoh," Antioch said gravely. "This is knowledge that only the Pharaoh and the high priest should have. Your sister. . . ."

Thothmaton turned respectfully to Selah.

"My sister, whose blood is my blood and whose first male child shall be my son and successor," he said, "you will leave us so that your ears shall not hear that which your tongue must not repeat."

Selah glared angrily at Bubastis, then stamped from the room.

Abrah strode silently along the cobblestone street. It had been many years since the time he had given the bewitched maid to the Pharaoh Thothmaton as a gift. He had never regretted it, but over the years in his long journeys to various countries he had thought of Bubastis often, and always with that feeling of misgiving, that foreboding of disaster.

He had stayed away from Memphis because of that, even though he could have prospered more by coming here to trade. Now he was back. The conviction had been growing during the past year that he would not live much longer. He wanted to learn what had happened to Bubastis.

There had been rumors of her that had reached even into his own country, Ham, rumors that he would have discounted if he had not known first hand that Bubastis existed.

He turned into a tavern he had visited before on his visits to Memphis. Taverns were always fruitful sources of information to a traveler. The place was almost deserted, as it was early afternoon.

He surveyed the place, his lips parting in a smile at the ludicrous expression on the face of the tavern keeper who was asleep in a chair. He crossed over and sat down at the same table, scraping his chair noisily.

The tavern keeper opened his eyes, blinked at his intruder in annoyance, then burst into profuse welcome as he recognized his customer.

"Welcome, Abrah of Ham," he exclaimed, speaking in hamitic which he knew as well as his own arabic. "It's many years since you've been here. Let me get you a drink of your favorite melon whiskey from the stocks you yourself sold me."

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He hurried away and quickly returned with the glazed jug bearing the seal of the trader Abrah.

"I've saved this to honor your long awaited return," he said, "though I could have sold this last jug a hundred times over."

"I'm deeply touched by this welcome, Metupher," Abrah said. "Tomorrow or the next day I will have my slaves deliver enough to last you many years. This, I fear may be my last visit to Memphis. I'm growing too old."

"Nonsense," Metupher said. "I know you. You will ride a camel along the trade routes until your last breath, even though your protesting bones force you to cry out in agony at each clumsy step of the accursed beast."

"That may be," Abrah said absently, sampling with approval the well-aged whiskey. "Tell me, my friend, I've been hearing many tales lately of the strange creature, Bubastis. Do you know anything about her?"

"Much more than the truth," Metupher said, "and perhaps a little of the truth also, though how to distinguish I don't know. This I do know, though. The Pharaoh now has a hundred thousand slaves encamped to the west two days' march, building what is destined to be the hugest of all structures in Egupt, and the most mysterious. I've heard several wild guesses as to its eventual shape. One is that it will contain only two small rooms where the Pharaoh and Bubastis can occasionally be alone together. Another is that the immortal Bubastis will seal herself up inside of a secret room deep within and stay there forever, alone."

"This Bubastis," Abrah said, pouring himself another glass of the whiskey brewed from the wild melons growing on the mountain slopes of northern Ham. "What of her? Are there any tales of her? Have you ever seen her?"

"Seen her?" Metupher said, glancing around to make sure no one had come in and would overhear him. "Because you are my lifelong friend and will be discreet I will tell you something that is worth my life if it ever gets out." He leaned forward and lowered his voice to a mere rumble. "The Pharaoh Thothmaton is her slave. To be sure, he has fulfilled his duty to Egupt and sired a male heir by his sister Selah, as well as a few female offspring by his other wives. Now that his duty is done he will have nothing to do with any woman except Bubastis, and she—"

He stopped abruptly and began pouring himself a drink.

"Yes?" Abrah prompted.

"It would be wiser for me to say no more, my lifelong friend," Metupher said. "The secret would weigh heavily on you. You might feel someday that it was worth repeating, and then one day the Pharaoh's Nubian soldiers would descend on this miserable tavern and take me to the torture chambers."

"I did not know that you found cause to consider me an old woman," Abrah said, starting to rise. "I will, of course, never again impose on one

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who has cause to hold me so low. It makes it necessary for me to continue this troubled life with my head hanging in shame that even one man has found just cause to—"

"Say no more," Metupher groaned. "I desperately need a generous stock of melon whiskey such as only you can provide. I gather that you are going to sell me your entire stock so that no one else in Memphis will have any to sell their customers. Then they will come here rather than drink the rotten stuff brewed and sold here in Memphis?"

"But of course," Abrah said, "if you are willing to pay a premium price for it and have the gold to buy fourteen camel loads of it."

"I have some gold," Metupher said cautiously, "though not enough to make it worthwhile for a thief to rob me. I have perhaps barely enough for a few camel loads, unless the price is not too steep."

"It isn't possible to discuss business with one who hasn't trusted me with a secret," Abrah said, "especially since that secret, like most, would probably prove to be not worth repeating."

He started to rise again, scraping his chair so that Metupher would not fail to notice.

"Be seated, my life-long trusted friend," Metupher said hastily. "There was never any doubt. My hesitation was only natural, as you will see when you have learned. Then you will forgive me, and no doubt have the kindness to sell me your entire stock of melon whiskey at a sacrifice to atone for your misjudgment of my esteem for you."

"This whiskey sharpens my ears," Abrah said. "They need dulling with your doubtlessly uninteresting tale."

"It is rumored," Metupher said, "that the Pharaoh Thothmaton is so madly in love with Bubastis that he will have no other in his chambers, yet she will not come to his chambers until this fantastic temple is finished."

"An uninteresting tale indeed," Abrah scoffed. "I have heard that a hundred times until I grow sleepy with hearing it repeated."

"But have you heard," Metupher said slyly, "that though she will not visit his chambers for his pleasure, she visits public houses of pleasure?"

"No!" Abrah exclaimed. "Is this some figment of the imagination?"

"It's the truth," Metupher said. "I myself—ah, have talked with men who boasted of having taken their pleasure with her. They didn't boast for long though, because the Pharaoh has many spies, and he is determined that no man who has been with Bubastis shall live to boast of it long."

"Which house of pleasure does she visit?" Abrah asked.

"No one can know ahead of time," Metupher said. "When she appears it is without advance notice, and can be at any of the hundreds of pleasure palaces throughout the city, or even the ill-kept dives along the waterfront. By now she is so well known that all she has to do is appear. Immediately the word goes out, and in a matter of minutes you can't get near the place, even though everyone knows that to be caught means death

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or hard labor on the new work going on at Gizeh." His expression softened. "To take pleasure with Bubastis is a pleasure never forgotten—or so those who have boasted of it say. Forever after ordinary females possess no appeal. In addition there is the knowledge that the Pharaoh himself cannot have what is given for the standard price to the commonest of freemen."

"There is no need for you to tell me your secret," Abrah said abruptly. "There is only one question I wish answered. How many have died for this?"

"Some say hundreds, some say thousands," Metupher said. "Some say that for every fool who is caught there are a thousand discrete men who dream their memories in silence, preferring not to share them, and live."

The memory of Settith and Hobar sprawled in death at the tent opening and of Bubastis crouched in a far corner of that tent rose before Abrah's eyes. Andra too, had grown gaunt and thin, and died of her broken heart before she could return to her home.

He gulped down the full glass of melon whiskey setting it before him. He stood up as he set the empty glass down.

"The entire stock shall be delivered to you, my friend Metupher," he said. "The price will be the weight in gold of a new born babe. You can get it back in two years by charging exhorbitant prices for each drink. That is much cheaper than your life." He stared at the bewildered and alarmed Metupher, his shoulders slowly sagging. "Forgive me, my friend," he said contritely. "I couldn't die in peace if I did that. The price will be as you say, a bargain. May your body be preserved forever when you die of old age in your bed."

His departure was as silent as had been his entrance. Outside he continued his slow walk. He passed one of the better class pleasure houses, which had been done over since he had last been this way. Its entrance was completely rebuilt.

He crossed over to get a better look at it. Over the entrance was a small statue. It was an almost life-like model of Bubastis. She smiled down at him as invitingly as she had looked at Hobar behind Settith's back. Two realistic agate cat-eyes gleamed from their sockets. Her ears were small and pointed like a panther's.

The sun was still below the eastern horizon across the river when Abrah completed his morning prayers. He stumbled over some of the words, unable to keep from thinking of all that the tavern keeper, Metupher, had told him the previous day.

When the last prayer had been spoken he stood up with a sigh and stepped out of his tent. The air was cool and fresh, holding in its gentle movements the sound of swallows, already flying about like ghostly shadows in the vague light of dawn.

He sank down on a pillow within reach of a basket of fruit and absently reached for some. His fingers encountered a strange shape.

He took one of the strange fruits.

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It was a bright yellow, long and curved. When he bit into it, the outer layer split open without yielding to his teeth. The taste was unpleasant. He started to lay it down.

"No, no!" the servant said. "You must try it. It's very delicious. See?" He took the fruit and removed the outer skin in long unbroken strips, leaving a white peeled fruit.

Abrah tasted this cautiously and found the flavor excellent, and nothing like the first taste.

"Very good," he said appreciatively. "In all my years I've encountered nothing even remotely like it. What is it?"

"It's called a banana," the servant said. "It comes from Atlantis."

"And where is this Atlantis, as new to me as this banana?" Abrah asked, taking another bite.

"It's the land Bubastis is from," the servant said, "far to the west across the great sea, or so the fruit merchants say. The story goes that Bubastis came from a world far to the west across the great sea that had always been believed to extend to the edge of the universe. Men began to yearn to go and see for themselves, and finally an expedition set out in a hundred ships, fearing that they would sail to the edge of Creation and fall off, but also hopeful that Bubastis had not lied.

"They weren't heard from for two years. Then one day two of the hundred ships came back. They brought with them tales of this great world of Atlantis, and though they found no people like Bubastis they brought with them people almost as strange, and tales of a river greater than the Nile, up which they sailed until they feared for sure they would come to the edge of the world and fall off.

"There they separated. Five of the ships turned back, bringing with them many strange plants, and some of the natives, as evidence of this land of Atlantis. Two of the ships returned safely. The other ships containing over a thousand men and women beached and continued overland in search of the cities of Bubastis' people whom they knew must be there.

"The banana is one of the fruits they brought back as proof that Bubastis had told the truth."

"Hmm," Abrah said, finishing the banana and eating another before he spoke again. "I wonder if Bubastis knows of this?" He picked up another of the bananas and studied it critically. "They have no seeds!" he exclaimed suddenly. "How do they reproduce?"

"The fruit merchant said the growers just cut off parts of old plants and partially bury them and they grow into new plants. The individual banana is with a hundred others in a thick cluster on a stalk. I imagine the plants themselves were brought back from Atlantis. The merchant said they are becoming very popular, and traders are engaging in a very lucrative trade. They even plant banana plants along their trade routes to the far south, especially along the shores of the great sea, because they grow like weeds and provide a never ending source of nourishing food, thus

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leaving more room for goods to be carried."

"That would be a good thing," Abrah said. "Tell Namo and Bemo to bring oils and perfumes and my best robes. Today I'm going to call on someone I must see once more before I leave this land of Egupt for the last time."

"Oh, by the way," Thothmaton said, pausing at the woven gold drapes hanging over the entrance to the room, "there is one who very persistently tries to see you, so persistently that after three days the scribes consented to advise me of it. He claims to be Abrah, the trader who first gave you to me."

As he said "gave you to me" his fingers went up and touched lightly the four parallel scars running from his cheek-bone to the jaw on the right side of his face.

"Abrah?" Bubastis said. "Has he been kept waiting for three days? I will see him, but first you will bring the scribes here, and also Nute with his whip. Each of the scribes will receive ten lashes for each day Abrah has waited."

Thothmaton's face darkened. He turned abruptly and left. Bubastis' lips curled in contempt at his departing back.

An hour later, the lashings over, Bubastis leaned back on her favorite couch, and expectantly watched the draped doorway through which Abrah must enter.

His entrance was so silent that she was not aware of it until he stood inside, and was looking across the room at her. She smiled, and motioned for him to sit in a chair near her. As he crossed the room she studied him.

He seemed to have aged much more than the few years warranted. It was his eyes, she decided. The flesh around them was more wrinkled, blacker—or rather redder or browner. It was always difficult to detect coloring in what she could not see with her own eyes.

"The years are weighing heavily on your shoulders, Abrah, my father," she said in his native hamitic.

He looked at her sharply. "You speak my native tongue very well," he said. "One of the tales I found hard to believe was that you could speak."

"I could speak before you left me here," Bubastis said, "but I didn't think it wise. My purpose then was to learn, and I could do so more quickly when those around me didn't know I could understand what they said." She smiled dreamily. "Strange," she went on. "Of all those I have come in contact with since I arrived, you stand out most in my thoughts. For you I have the deepest respect and regard."

"But for none others," Abrah said dryly. "I once had the urge to destroy you. From what I have heard in the last few days, by destroying you I would have saved the lives of many hundreds of men."

"They mean nothing," Bubastis said, shrugging her shoulders. "As you yourself know, the land is filled with stupid male creatures who live only for their appetites. They are less

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than the beasts that are slaughtered each day in the market places for food, but only seem more because their parents were human. Even the Pharaoh, who rules Egupt and many bordering nations is ruled by his passions."

"That's a mystery I would like for you to explain," Abrah said. "Why do you deny him what you give the lowest fishmonger on the waterfront?"

Bubastis reached up and touched her small pointed ears. The vertical slits of her eyes widened until they were round with anger.

"I see," Abrah said softly. "Once I was intending to do the same to you, to make you more human, but I didn't." He chuckled dryly. "It must have slipped my mind in the grief of the deaths of my two dearest companions."

"For that I have often been sorry," Bubastis said. "I didn't know then that I felt respect for you, and that they meant anything to you. It was idle amusement that I could have dispensed with. As for the Pharaoh, I have another purpose in denying him his pleasure with me. I quickly estimated the workings of his mind and found that if I were to give him pleasure he would at once lose interest in me. A starved passion refuses to die. A sated passion dies from overfeeding."

"All of which does not concern me in the least," Abrah said, "since I am an old man. There is much I would like to know. Tell me of this temple or tomb, or whatever it's destined to be that you are having built at Gizeh. What is its purpose? Also, what became of the strange thing you came in, the ship, if that is what it was? I can't understand how a ship could sail across the great sea to the west and then leap into the air and fall to the ground a hundred days' journey overland. When I passed the spot where it had rested on my way to Memphis this time, it was no longer there. The grass where it had rested was still white, showing that it had been moved only recently."

"I brought it to Gizeh," Bubastis said. "I'd like to show you what is going on there. Would you come out with me and let me show you?"

She leaned forward and placed her hand on his wrist, an eager expression on her face. Abrah looked down at the hand which was delicately formed and long fingered, with beautiful sheaths from which needle sharp claws barely peeked. He pictured those sharp claws raking across the Pharaoh's cheek, gashing so deeply that they would leave the scars he had noticed.

He lifted his gaze to her unusually large eyes and noticed for the first time that the narrow pupil slits widened and narrowed perceptibly at the pace of a beating heart, producing an almost hypnotic effect.

"Yes," he said carefully, sensing to the full the danger of this female. Her nearness was both wonderful and terrible. When she drew back, taking her hand from his wrist, he felt himself unaccountably trembling and shaken as he had seldom been before. "Yes," he repeated. "I would like very much to see what you are doing at

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Gizeh, and why."

"By the gods of Ham!" Abrah said in surprise as the camel supporting the carriage in which he and Bubastis rode came to a stop at the edge of the excavation." Why lay the floor so far below the surrounding country? The temple will never rise high enough to be even seen!"

"That isn't the floor," Bubastis said. "There will be many layers over that first one."

"Then your ship will be covered over," Abrah said.

"That's one of the things which is intentional," Bubastis said. "As you can see, the ship is in the center of this first layer. Under it is nothing but the loose subsand. The quarried blocks of stone are each as large as the ship, so that it merely takes the place that should be occupied by another block of stone. The next layer will cover it over."

"Then this is a tomb for your ship," Abrah said. "I see in you a sentiment I hadn't suspected. However, may I point out that it would be a simple matter for thieves to dig under this first layer and reach it, and even dig a large enough tunnel to bring out from its resting place?"

"There is no sentiment," Bubastis said, "and you have divined why I place it in the bottom layer of blocks. The one who eventually tunnels to bring out the ship will be me."

"But," Abrah said, a confused frown on his face, "that seems so senseless. It will undoubtedly take many years, perhaps a lifetime, to raise any kind of structure here. You imply that its sole purpose will be to hide your ship until you wish to use it once more. Before the structure is completed you will be tunneling under it."

"I think not," Bubastis said. "When I was born the first Pharaoh had not yet come from the Sun. When I take my ship from its resting place, this very ground our camel stands upon will be silt on the floor of the eastern oceans, blown there by the winds of the centuries. I have told no one else of this. It is the truth."

"But not the whole truth," Abrah said. He grinned suddenly. "I think the main truth is that you despise the Pharaoh Thothmaton and have cunningly set him to building this structure so that by the time it is finished and he can take his pleasure with you he will be too old."

"That may be part of the truth also," Bubastis said without smiling. "Another part is that Antioch the high priest fancies himself a prophet, and is incorporating his prophecies for future ages in the structure of this pile of stone."

"And is he a prophet?" Abrah asked.

"There are prophets and prophets," Bubastis said. "He is as one who cannot see his own hand except as a blur, but can see the hair of a camel on the horizon."

Abrah nodded without answering. He was watching the thousands of men below as they inched giant blocks of stone toward their resting places in eternity.

"As for the building of this pyramid of stone," Bubastis said after a

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while, "it will not take as long as you think. I have given the quarry masters a device that cuts stone as sharply as a copper knife cutting cheese, and even more easily."

For another hour Abrah watched while Bubastis sat patiently beside him. Finally he turned his eyes away from the work below.

"We can return to Memphis now," he said. "I believe at last I know you as well as myself."

"Yes, my father," Bubastis said. She gave orders to the slaves in arabic.

"Atlantis, your homeland, must be a wonderful place," Abrah said after another long silence during which the site of the pyramid was left far behind.

"In its own way," Bubastis said, "but all things are relative, absolutism being merely a yardstick within a single world. I find Egupt quite as wonderful as Atlantis ever was, and without some of the things that made my homeland unbearable."

"My own land is much more beautiful than Egupt," Abrah said. "I'd like to tell you a story of someone there. It's the story of a girl such as yourself. She was the daughter of the chief of a large hill tribe, beautiful beyond description, pure beyond defilement. She could have lain naked in the market place or on a couch in a house of pleasure and the most lustful of men would have felt shame to look on her, let alone touch her. Goodness was a spirit that surrounded her like a cloak, and shone from her as the light of day shines from the sun. She—"

"Your story bores me, and I do not wish to sleep now," Bubastis cut in.

"There is a saying spoken by the wise men from the east," Abrah went on slowly, "that only those who fall from Heaven can dent the bottom. This girl, if anyone ever was, was from Heaven."

"Your story is beginning to anger me," Bubastis said.

"Ah then," Abrah sighed, "I'll discontinue it. I was telling it only because I thought it might amuse you on our long and tiresome journey. I will not tell you how, because of a glandular difficulty, she became overnight the most infamous of wenches fleeing her own household and refusing to submit to a cure. Finally her father caught up with her and slew her to preserve the name of his house."

The anger in Bubastis's eyes flared up to almost insane intensity. Abrah returned her stare calmly, watching the insane light slowly die down.

The buildings of Memphis sprawled along the entire eastern horizon when Bubastis broke the silence that had hung between her and Abrah.

"It will soon be time for us to go our separate ways, my father Abrah," she said, almost humbly.

"Yes," he said, "and it will be forever. I'm returning to my native Ham, if I live out the journey. More and more I dream of spending my last days sitting in the sun, dreaming dreams of the past. You may be sure that those dreams will often be of you."

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"Yes," Bubastis whispered, echoing his thought, "our parting will be forever. Because of that I would like to make a last request, and also give you a gift which I have in mind."

"If it's within my power I'll grant any request you might make," Abrah said.

"You might think it senseless or foolish," Bubastis said.

"Even though that might be true I would still grant it," Abrah said. "There is a saying from the far east beyond the mountains at the far border of Ham—but I am tired and can't recall it now."

"You will accompany me to my quarters in the summer palace where we will consumate my wishes," Bubastis said. "Then I will have my slaves carry you to your camp."

To Abrah it seemed only a second later that strong hands seized him gently and lifted him. He had fallen asleep. He allowed himself to be carried into the palace to Bubastis' quarters. At Bubastis' command the slaves laid him out on her favorite couch.

Female Nubians appeared from nowhere and divested him of his garments, massaging his tired body with oils containing soothing ointments.

Grape wine from the Pharaoh's choicest cellar warmed him. During all this Bubastis paced the floor impatiently, reminding Abrah of a caged cat; but when he suggested that these things be dispensed with if she were anxious for him to be gone, she shook her head.

"These things are most necessary for what is to be done," she said.

Then at last they were alone. Abrah looked up at her, full of curiosity as to what she might have in mind.

"Let us say," she said abruptly, "that what I am going to do is a custom of my own world. That is only partly the truth. The rite is a custom, but it's ordinarily performed only between father and child. I want you to understand fully, because my request is based on your full understanding."

"I will do my best, Bubastis," Abrah said.

"Very well," Bubastis said.

She went to a chest and lifted its lid and brought forth a flat metal box. She opened this, and a strange scent filled the room. She took out a small device.

"This," she said, "is a hypodermic needle. The strange odor you smell is a sterilizing substance. Those words are strange to you and it would take too long to explain their meanings."

While Abrah watched she took a small bit of cloth, dipped it in the wine, and scrubbed a small spot on his arm. She similarly cleaned a spot on her own arm.

Then she carefully inserted the sharp needle into a vein in her arm. Abrah's eyes widened in surprise as he saw dark red fluid fill the transparent chamber.

"Now," she said, "we must do this quickly."

She drew out the needle. When she bent to insert it in his arm he drew back in alarm. Instantly his pride forced him to thrust out his arm. He could not flinch from what a woman had done without flinching.

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There was less pain than he had expected when the needle entered his skin. His eyes were wide as he saw the plunger pressed down with infinite slowness, forcing the red fluid into his own vein.

"It's done," Bubastis said, drawing out the gleaming needle. "There is now some of my blood flowing with yours. It will mingle with yours. That blood is more ancient than—than the ancient mountains of your native country of Ham."

"It produces a tingling in my nostrils," Abrah said.

"Never mind that," Bubastis said. "You must concentrate on what I am saying. Have you heard what I say? You must never forget."

"I have heard," Abrah said.

"Good," Bubastis said. "Now listen. I'm giving you this case containing more needles and an extra syringe. When you reach your native land you will marry again and beget a son, and—"

Abrah's laugh interrupted her.

"You will see that I speak the truth," Bubastis said. "You will call him Isaac which is the name of my father, and when he is old enough to comprehend your words you will repeat this rite of blood transfer, giving him of your blood which contains some of mine. Then you will give to him this case and pledge him to do the same to his son, and so on forever."

"But why?" Abrah asked. "I don't understand."

"You will before another fortnight has passed," Bubastis said. "You will then comprehend fully the gift I've given you. Now for the request."

"Your request can't be any more strange than your gift," Abrah said. "I'm an old man. Death hovers over me, yet you prophesy that I will reach my own land and sire a male child. Your gift is not only to me, but to that unborn, nay unconceived son, and his son, on to eternity. Doubtful though that gift seems, I accept it and pledge my word that it shall be fulfilled as you desire. I can do no less than grant your request now, so long as it can be fulfilled honorably."

"Then this is my request," Bubastis said. "Warn all citizens of Ham in Egupt to return to their own land, so that my revenge shall not fall on their heads." As she spoke she ran a finger lightly over the edge of her small pointed ears where they had been trimmed by the Pharaoh's order at the insistence of Selah, his sister.

"Welcome to my miserable tavern, my lifelong friend," Metupher said, coming out from behind the bar and dusting off a chair for Abrah to sit on. "The store of melon whiskey came two days ago. Your gold is waiting for you."

"You're an honest man," Abrah said, smiling, as he sat down.

"Oh, by the way, Abrah," Metupher said. "A fellow countryman of yours is over there by the window."

Abrah looked where Metupher pointed. "Lot!" he exclaimed "Come over here, you old fishmonger, and join me in my cups."

"Abrah, my uncle!" Lot cried out in delight. He leaped across the room

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and pounded Abrah on the back heartily.

"Carefu—!" Abrah began. Then, "That's strange, my rheumatism seems to have foresaken me for the moment. Sit down and tell me what you've been doing."

It was an hour later. Abrah and Lot had brought each other up to date on their separate existences. They had also consumed several generous dosages of melon whiskey.

Abrah glanced around covertly to make sure no one was paying attention to them.

"Lot," he said cautiously. "The gods of Ham must have arranged this happenchance meeting, for I have a task to perform which you can carry out for me, since my days are numbered."

"By strange coincidence I am here at this time because of a dream I had which told me to be here," Lot said. This wasn't the truth, but it sufficed to encourage the giving of a secret.

"That I can believe, as you will when I've told you what I must," Abrah said. He glanced around again, then leaned forward, whispering into Lot's ear. "All sons of Ham must flee from Egupt, for Egupt is to be destroyed by fire and brimstone shortly."

"No!" Lot said. "How do you know of this? Or is it the inspiration of the melon whiskey that tells you this?"

"It's the truth," Abrah said solemnly, "and you have never known me to lie except in a business transaction."

"That's the truth," Lot said. "I'm inclined to believe you. Logic tells me no land can remain so full of corruption as Egupt without being destroyed by fire and brimstone."

"Good," Abrah said. "At sunrise I begin my journey homeward. I leave in your hands the fulfilling of my pledged to warn all Hamites to flee back to their homeland. You are my blood nephew, the son of my brother Haran. My word is your word. You will fulfill it?"

"That I will, my uncle Abrah," Lot said. "In secret I will go over all of Memphis and warn our countrymen to leave, and to pass the word along. Then I myself will follow you. How soon is this cleansing of the earth of Egupt to take place?"

"When Pharaoh takes his pleasure with Bubastis," Abrah said. The thought of this struck him as exceedingly funny. He began laughing. "Wh-wh-when Thothmaton t-takes his p-pleasure—" He doubled up in mirth. Suddenly he sobered. A puzzled expression came over him. "That's funny," he said. "That's the first time in a score of years, drunk or sober, that I've been able to laugh heartily without going into a fit of coughing. I feel—why, I feel like I used to when I was forty or so. Younger! I wonder . . ."

"Wonder what?" Lot asked.

"Oh, it's nothing," Abrah said. "When I left Ham last time, Marai my wife had a maid servant who was quite young and beautiful. I wonder if she still is in my household. . . ."

"You *are* growing younger, my blood uncle," Lot said with a broad wink. "There is a pleasure palace one

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square from here."

Abrah shuddered. "No thanks. I could never pass those cat eyes of the image of Bubastis. I think her soul looks out from them and sees and judges all who enter. No, tomorrow at sunrise my camels begin their journey back to the land of their birth, and I go with them. I will never return here, though the time will come when my seed shall overrun Egupt and repopulate the wilderness that it is to become."

He seemed to have forgotten Lot as he staggered out the door.

"His seed!" Lot shouted gleefully. "Did you hear that, Metupher? An old man to whom sex is but a dim memory. Childless, and in his cups he speaks of his seed!"

Bubastis leaned against the polished alabaster rail of her balcony looking up at the stars in the cool cloudless sky. The candle light on the other side of the drapes to her quarters filtered through, making the rich cream color of her long robe stand out in the gloom.

Low in the western sky hung a bright red jewel. It was, she knew, her native planet Atlantis, the fourth planet out from the Sun.

The time she had at first dreaded but had now come to hope for, was close. Once again Atlantis and the world that cradled Egupt and Ham to its bosom were drawing close together.

Perhaps already the constant signal sent out from Zhuti's ship was reaching across the great sea of space to the receivers in her father's ships. They would be able to take bearings and find the direction the signal came from.

Perhaps already ships were crossing the void, under orders that her father had promised he would give if she escaped. He would have no choice. The Council would have her destroyed anyway if she were to give herself up. They would do so because she had violated her racial oath and the oath of the Stellar Council to have no contact of any kind with the third planet until its races had evolved to the point where they could send their own ships across the void.

She sighed wearily. Perhaps Abrah had been right. Perhaps it was a glandular defect that drove her on her wild course in defiance of law. But—she touched her disfigured ear sadly, there was no turning back the clock of fate.

The curtains parted at her back. Thothmaton stepped out onto the balcony beside her.

"The time has come, Bubastis," he said. "The pyramid is done. Deep within its bowels are the chambers of our troth, waiting for the fulfillment of your word."

She half turned, raising her hand until a ring on her finger was pressed against her ear. Faintly, very faintly, sounded a voice in her native language.

"Bubastis," it whispered, "we have a bearing on your position. We've located Zhuti's ship and also yours, though you've buried it under a pile of stone to weaken the reflected radar waves. We'll give you two revolutions of this planet to come up and give

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yourself up. If you don't, you will have the blood of all those within a radius of five hundred miles on your soul, because we have orders to drop an altitude exploding hydrogen bomb."

"What were you saying?" Bubastis said, looking up absently at the Pharaoh. "Oh, yes. Yes, you have fulfilled your part of our bargain. I'm ready to fulfill mine—in the chambers deep within the monument to your love of me. I have no doubt that when you find the ecstacy that you have dreamed of all these years the very earth will tremble and shake."

"I'm hoping," Thothmaton said, his voice thick with passion, "that the culmination of our love will produce a new line of Pharaohs, for if you beget a son I intend to destroy the hereditary heir and put our son in his place on the throne."

"We shall see," Bubastis said. "But come, it's two days' journey and we must hurry—before your passion spends itself on too much anticipation."

They left the balcony.

"Slaves! Slaves!" Thothmaton shouted. "Prepare your mistress for a journey. Hurry."

"Yes, hurry," Bubastis said.

An hour later the litter bearing Thothmaton and Bubastis was speeding over the streets of Memphis, carried by twenty Nubian slaves and followed by others.

The curtained interior was lighted by candles, their light reflecting richly from the burnished gold carvings that lined it.

"Oh! I nearly forgot!" the Pharaoh said, drawing a rolled parchment from his blouse. "A messenger brought this from Ham for you. It's from that old merchant, Abrah."

Bubastis took it eagerly and unrolled it. Thothmaton read it over her shoulder unashamedly.

"My daughter whose blood flows in my veins;" it read, "know you that it now flows also in the veins of my son, and that I am young again beyond the wildest possible imaginings. Know you also that I have kept my pledge, and that my seed shall come to honor you when the season is ripe."

"The old fool," Thothmaton chuckled. "He was in love with you all the time! Imagine that! Such flowery phrases. 'My daughter whose blood flows in my veins.' Ha!"

Suddenly Bubastis laughed, her laughter tinkling gayly in the silence. A load seemed to have left her shoulders.

"My lover," she said, twining her arms about the Pharaoh. "It is well the temple to our love was finished before you became as old as he. What driving will you had! How many slaves died in the construction as you drove them on? Ten thousand? A hundred thousand? It doesn't matter. They were but a drop in the sea of life. It would be a fitting tribute to our love if all other life in Egupt should cease as we mate within our love chamber. We must hurry. Bring out your whip and drive the slaves to greater speed. I will sleep so that I will be fresh and rested."

There was a gentle shake on her shoulder. Bubastis opened her large

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green eyes, blinking sleepily.

"We're here, my love," the Pharaoh said. His eyes were feverish with passion. It was obvious that he was restraining himself only by supreme effort, knowing that in another hour the constant obsession of his life would reach its climax in fulfillment.

Bubastis yawned daintily, revealing her firm red tongue and gleaming white teeth. She cradled her hand under her head so that the ring rested against her ear and smiled up at Thothmaton.

"The ship carrying the hydrogen bomb is in position," a voice whispered. "In ten minutes unless we hear from you that bomb will be dropped. Three minutes later it will explode at an altitude of ten thousand feet. You have nine minutes and ten seconds, nine minutes. . . ."

"I'm ready, my passionate lover," Bubastis said, holding out her hand. For a moment she let out her sharp claws, then, laughing, drew them into their sheaths.

The Pharaoh took her hand and helped her from the litter. As she stepped out into the glaring sunlight the slaves dropped to their bellies, hiding their faces.

With a tinkling laugh Bubastis broke away from Thothmaton and ran down the trail to the tunnel opening leading into the central chamber of the buried pyramid.

Thothmaton, with a triumphant shout, ran after her. He did not catch up with her until she had reached the room deep within the pile of stone that had been prepared for this moment.

As he reached to embrace her she laughingly eluded his grasp, leaping onto the thick cushioning of pillows and mattresses that had been placed here at her orders.

The Pharaoh leaped after her. As his arms encircled her and crushed her against him she slipped under him so that he lay on her. She wriggled deeper into the pillows, her arms reaching out and piling other pillows over and around her.

Her eyes danced in excitement as Bubastis drew a pillow over her face and pulled Thothmaton's face into it, pressing with all her strength so that neither could breathe or expell the breath in their lungs.

At that instant there was a dizzy swaying. An instant later, as Thothmaton succeeded in freeing himself of the suffocation of the pillow, a deep rumbling sound came from the walls around them.

"What was that!" he exclaimed. "My ears are ringing. I feel dizzy as though this were a ship on a stormy sea."

"It was nothing," Bubastis said dreamily. "In all Egupt there is no one but *us* at this moment, my lover." Her slender arm freed itself. Her finger ran lightly along the scarred edge of her small pointed ear. "Is this not the moment we have both dreamed of?"

Her lips parted in a smile of supreme contentment as she closed her eyes and yielded to the Pharaoh's embrace.

THE END

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THE MERCHANT OF VENUS

When the travelling theatrical group landed on the little planetoid they had no idea that the immortal bard would be needed to settle a family quarrel and to save their lives as well.

By
RICHARD ASHBY

Heral Smith Agency
Professional Bldg.
Port Luna
Hello, friend Heral:

As is my custom I tender to you another piece of correspondence to be put in your files under "J. Marty Reed," for you have ever been more to me than a mere booking agent. In effect, you are the custodian of those papers which will one day, no doubt, find their way into my formal biography—a beacon-like study that will, in years to come, throw a cool and cogent light upon this mid-23rd century . . . and upon myself, as I humbly admit that I represent an important aspect of the Art Life of our times.

Before I proceed with the account of my last engagement, I must remember to acknowledge the receipt of my manuscript. It reached me by packet just before we left Mars. I

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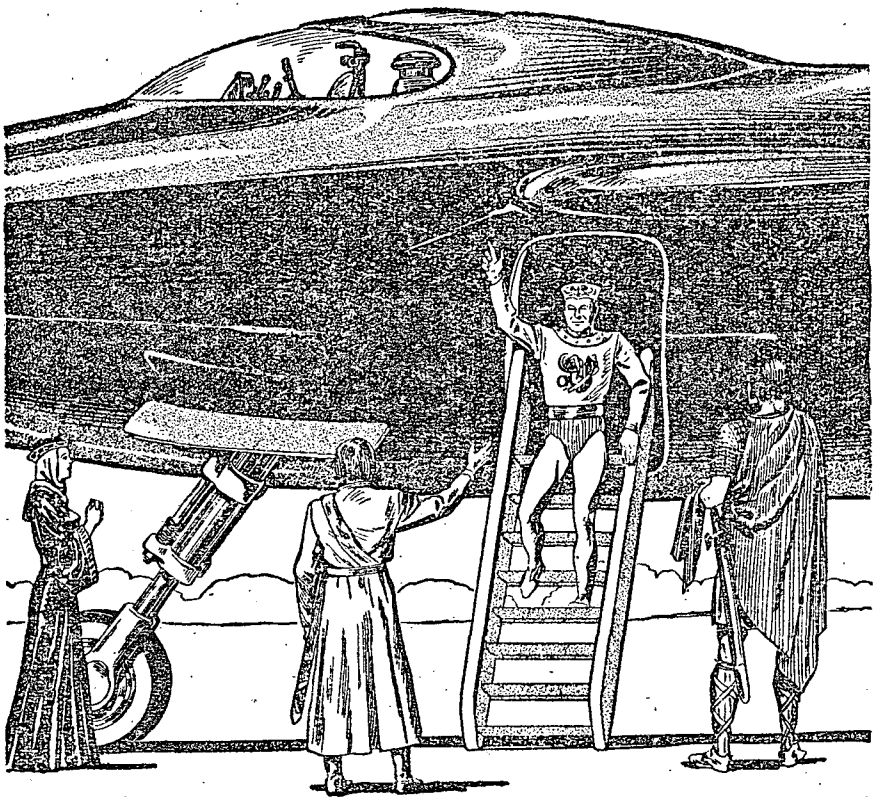

Illustration by Malcolm Smith

shall not suggest that you have not shown diligence in presenting it to the proper publishers, for I know you to be tireless and astute and consecrated to the finest that is Theatre. But is it not a sorry commentary upon the Culture of today that such a work as my "Flamingo Dream" has found neither publisher nor producer? (Did you try Doubleday? Simon & Schuster?)

The hour is 21 by the clock here in the forward stateroom. I light my pipe (that superb meerschaum given me by the Flagstaff Little Theatre) and reflect upon what has transpired in the past week. Where to begin—is that not ever the chronicler's task? Perhaps with Mars. . .

Solis Lacus was not too kind. The people, of course, loved us, but the critics had presumably been hard upon a diet of belu-weed, so senseless and bitter were their attacks.

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It was, therefore, with some relief that I received your gram to proceed to Lima One to offer our cycle to the house of the 'roid's Leader and Lady.

Our crossing was uneventful and tiring. Few of us got much sleep, for the second-hand cruiser which was assigned us had a mean habit of yawing as it went into drive, and shuddering when it emerged. (Couldn't something newer and better been found, something longer than 200 feet? The twelve of us were utterly caged in this craft. Be that as it may . . . I do not wish to sound unduly concerned with anything so grossly material.) We spent the travel time, as usual, attending to our wardrobe and effects, and I . . . when inspiration seized me . . . turned my hand to scribbling a few new playlets.

Also, we had nightly study groups over the few charts and photo-maps and models of Lima One which were made available. And our pilot (who was turning out to be a fair juvenile lead, as I had hoped) concerned himself with the phones, in constant endeavor to learn more of the regulations and flightways of the Feranti Cluster.

The Feranti! Lima One! How can I describe it all to one who has never been there. My imagination boggles. . . .

As you are perhaps aware, there are several thousand such bodies as Lima One in the entire Feranti Cluster . . . ranging in size from diminutive estates of fifteen cubic miles, on up to the huge city-states, afloat on their saucers of dwarf matter.

We were but 50,000 miles from Venus, moving out, when the Cluster was sighted. I could not resist calling the members of my troupe together in the lounge and retelling the glorious story of how the Dominion had found such a pitifully few planets capable of supporting life; how imperative was the need for living space if man was to go on; and how, but a scant hundred and fifty years ago, The Swarm was found at the rim of our system. What a saga I painted in that hour—of men setting forth in tugs for the spot, traveling in warp because they then were ignorant of the horrible gene effect of hyper-time, which cut out individual bodies from The Swarm and lugged them through black and weary space into the friendly light of Sol. I also told what I knew of the struggle to work with tool the dwarf matter, and of the herculean tasks men accomplished in providing the new 'roids with heat, atmosphere, water, and a proper ecology. With one hand flung out at the glittering spectacle of Feranti, I concluded with: "There is our triumph. There before us, and in a thousand other such clusters about the system . . . there has man *made* lebensraum, and with trust in God and in the Dominion he *shall go on!*" It was a very electric moment. I could feel I had been magnificent. Not one of my troupe could speak. (I had the foresight to make a sight-sound tape of my address. After editing it and touching it up here and there I shall entrust you with two

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copies. One for the file "J. Marty Reed" and the other for you to sell. I am certain it would find favor in classrooms if not in home libraries. Be sure to retain full rights, Heral.)

At the edge of the drift with its gay kaleidoscope of lights stretching thousands of miles out and up, we were met by a pilot boat and escorted past the shoals into the very heart of the Feranti Cluster. Fifty miles from Lima One the pilot boat uncoupled and stood off, and we dropped down to our destination.

The light of Lima One was of a soft peach hue, as if dawn and sunset were vying for the velvety shadows of its lakes and forests. I was surprised to find it such a small affair, for last year's almanac said the 'roid housed four thousand. Later, however, I discovered that the single ramble of buildings that make up the city goes down as far as up, leaving nine-tenths of the land a park with nary a trail nor hut to break its virgin aspect.

The customs' party which issued forth to meet us as we grounded was, I swear, riding horses! A craft from out of the Cluster was evidently something of a novelty, for we were welcomed by women and children, each astride an animal . . . as was customary of the earthlings back in the days of the New Deal and Lincoln.

The quarantine was a farce. A medic, smartly clad in silk and leather, looked at our papers, thumped our chests, and made out a receipt for our landing bond.

This, then, was Lima One!

No matter how one has acquainted himself beforehand with the folkways and manners of a people . . . no matter what sights one has seen, or the life one has lived, to land on ground other than one's birthsoil is always somewhat of a thrill—or am I prematurely old at sixty? For as I peered from the salon ports I could already sense the subtle strangeness of Lima One. While waiting for my hosts to arrive, or at least for some transportation to take us from the landing meadow into the city, I speculated upon the various social patterns that mankind follows when he flourishes off Terra or Luna. While I speculated, I waited for the horses to ride off. I am no more frightened by such beasts than most men, but as the leader of the troupe I felt a certain sense of responsibility to those in my charge. It was not until I saw that most of my actors had debarked and were mingling with Limans that I realized my precautions had been wasted. In a moment I, too, was breathing in the crisp and fragrant atmosphere of this tiny world. The horses paid utterly no attention to me.

What magnificent specimens, physically at least, are the people of Lima I thought. I have since learned that ugly children and the old among the commoners are not allowed to remain here. Nor is obesity long tolerated, even amongst members of the two leading families..

I strode boldly up to the nearest citizen, a stark and sinuous woman with long red hair who sat her mount as though it were a stool. "Greetings," I said. "I am J. Marty Reed,

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playwright and director of this group."

She looked down at me, rather coldly I fancied, and said, "Well?"

"Can you tell me where we are to go?"

The woman wheeled her beast about and called to someone. "Hey, Matthew, when's the funeral over? This guy wants to know where he goes." Someone shouted back a reply which I did not catch.

"Funeral?"

"Red hair" nodded. "A nephew of the Leader. He was killed two days ago."

It was then, to my shock, I noticed that she and the others on horseback were wearing swords. Had it not been for their saddles of fine plastic, and the tiny phone-cases at their wrists, I would have sworn I was back in the days of knights and bicycles and the war between the United States.

"The Leader and the Lady and the others are not at the burial party. It'll go on all night, no doubt, but Matthew is to take you through the gate and to your rooms. I don't know anything about your luggage."

"But my dear lady . . ." Her eyes had been wandering, however, and she rode rudely off to join a knot of women who were gathered around talking with my pilot and two other actors.

So began our first day on Lima One. When the others were escorted into the city . . . some of them actually riding beasts that had been brought empty for them—I stayed behind with our effects. I cannot say I was too pleased with our reception.

Early the next morning I was awakened by the arrival of the transport, and spent the next few hours supervising the moving of our costumes and cameras and viewers into the city. Our quarters were in the top wing of a graceful stone tower, which offered a splendid view of the jumble of spires and arches and ramparts that made up Lima One's skyline. There was little to complain of in our wing. The furnishings were rich and tasteful, and bore the stamps of some of the finest emporiums on Venus. Our food was sent in, warm and in generous quantities, and while there was an over-abundance of fish and game, I found no fault with the flavors.

That afternoon I was summoned from the suite I had taken for my own use, by a young lass in conservative halter and shorts. She announced that her Ladyship would speak with me, and quickly led me down a reach of twisting corridors to a small column set into a span of cold stone wall. The lass produced a key, and she touched it to the lock whereby a section of the column slid in upon itself, revealing the interior of a satin-lined elevator.

"Her own," the attendant informed me. "We drop straight to her chambers."

We did. The door slid in, and a wave of warm and perfumed air assailed my sensitive nostrils. By the dim glow of lanterns, I could make out the lavish silken and velvet aspect of my surroundings. I stood before a

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vast canopied bed. To the left and right, in the further reaches of the gloom, were the usual fittings and trappings of a woman's room—mirrors, closets, chests and lounges.

Quizzically, I turned to my guide, but I faced only an imperturbable smoothness of wall. She had gone.

"Come here, man." A woman spoke . . . her voice low and soft, but seasoned with authority. I saw her then; a splendid creature with white face and black hair, sitting crosslegged at the far shadowy end of the bed's expanse. Gallantly, I moved forward, and dropped to one knee.

"I am most honored. On behalf of myself and my troupe, I wish. . . ."

"What's your name?" she interrupted. She took an apple from the headboard and sniffed it delicately.

"J. Marty Reed."

"What's the 'J' for? Or is it a spelled name?" Eyeing me, the woman took a swift sharp bite from the apple.

My knee was tiring, but I hadn't yet been bidden to rise. "James, your Ladyship."

"Call me Alice. You want an apple? They're not very good. I'm in mourning."

"I'm very sorry to hear that," I murmured. — "About the young nephew that is. — And no apple, thanks."

"If your name is James, why do you *not* call yourself James?" She threw the fruit across the room, and as tribute to her accuracy, it *bonged* into some receptacle.

"It's the custom in the Theatre, in some branches of Literature, and in other arts, Alice, for one to avoid such a commonness as ordinary first names."

She sat up straight and glared at me. I was growing sufficiently accustomed to the inadequate illumination to see that her eyes were as black as her hair, that her mouth was large and very red, and that all in all . . . despite her frown . . . she was extremely comely. Her costume of grey trousers and vestlet was becoming to her lush figure. "So, Reed! I am common because I call myself Alice?"

"Your Ladyship, surely you know that the First Woman of Lima could not possibly be so described. The mirror alone must tell you that. Your beauty, your liquid tranquil voice, your queenly bearing . . ." I left the sentence unfinished, for I saw her relax somewhat. A smile played at the corners of her mouth.

Obviously, I had lost none of my knack with women.

"Call me Alice."

"Alice."

"Have a peach." She tossed me one. Nimbly I caught it and found it to be frightfully fuzzy. I bit at it bravely.

"Come up here and sit, man." Wriggling over, she patted the bed's satin coverlet. Did I dare?

There seemed to be no one else in the vast room. I dared.

"May I presume to tell you something of my humble self, Alice?" I began modestly. "I am . . ."

"What about your turn, your act? How does it go? Do you use a stage?"

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"Oh, no. We're Life Players." I slipped off my sandals and crossed my legs comfortably on the bed. Then I told her about our group; how we were hired by one or two spectators to conduct our dramas on busy city streets, in ships, in hotels and private homes, and how an occasional spectator or two follows along and is totally ignored by the actors as they perform.

"As though we were peepers? And invisible?"

I nodded. What a sweet, naive child she was. "Exactly. The actors pay no attention to you. They are trained to make room for you in a craft without seeing you. They allow you into their private lives, so to speak. The effect is vastly more flexible and realistic than the crude methods of a few generations ago."

"And you . . . what parts do you play?"

"Your Ladyship, Alice, *I* am the director."

"Oh." She lay back against the padded headboard and surveyed me. "So you tag along with the audience?"

"Lands, no! I sit in my chambers before view screens and cue my players over phones. They wear the speakers hidden in their hair. You see, more than two-thirds of our plays are done from just a rough plot, so they are utterly dependent upon J. Marty Reed for their dialogue and business."

She seemed rather unimpressed, so I hastened to add that my troupe and I were considered the best in the business. "Tell me, my dear, how many will attend our little offerings? You and the Leader? No more?" I was particularly anxious to stress the fact that the audience be held to two —three at the most. So often, up in the sticks, one finds an actual crowd of watchers.

Alice pursed her lips thoughtfully for a moment. "The Leader and I . . . Uncle Jether . . . Uncle Paul . . . Aunt Lornel and her children. . . . The scribe and his wife and family . . . and thirty or forty cousins."

"But your Ladyship! That's impossible. Why, that's . . ."

"I spoke only of my side of the family. The Leader, of course, will wish to bring his . . . his kin along. All told, let us say about a hundred."

Sternly, I folded my arms and stood. "That cannot be. Why, in three plays, the audience gets into an air car with my players. There are at least ten vital scenes in which the audience is to look over a player's shoulder as he marks a passage in a book, or writes a note, or reads a letter. A hundred people! How are they to fit into a cab? How are they to crowd about an angry married couple in their bed? It's utterly out of the question, my Lady. I'm very, very, sorry, but no. A hundred!" I laughed, hollowly.

"A hundred," she said serenely, "perhaps more. I have not yet decided about my favorite servants, and their families, of course."

I drew myself up and frowned down at her. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to speak to the Leader about this. I'm certain he was advised of our procedures."

The Lady Alice lounged herself

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into a new and more comfortable position, and despite my indignation, I couldn't help but marvel at the gossamer qualities of her garb. "He has been advised."

"Then I must speak to him immediately."

"Nope." She took a long and thick strand of her ebony hair and began to plait it. "He's busy up in the Dark Tower—dueling."

"Du—"

"But of course. He has to avenge his nephew. Today he fights . . . let's see . . ." she frowned prettily, "first, Albert the younger, his father next, and then Maxwell the physician. Poor Maxwell let the boy die, you see."

When I found my breath I mumbled something about one man fighting so many.

"He never loses." Her voice carried an odd blend of pride and boredom. "It's a Dark Tower duel, you see, and the Leader is very good at that. He goes in at one end of the hall—where there is absolutely no light, and his opponent enters at the other." A delicious shiver possessed her for a moment. "They use hatchets."

I sat back on the edge of the bed. Hatchets!

What mad parody of civilization had I blundered into? "Dueling," I finally managed, "is prohibited by the laws of the Dominion. Surely that is understood here?"

"Pah! There are eight thousand, four hundred, and seventy-one 'roids in the Feranti Cluster. There are over a thousand such clusters in the system. I have seen men of the Patrol but five times in my life, so who is to say we cannot settle problems here in our own honorable fashion? Do you?"

"Not I," I said weakly.

"Well, then!" And that finished that. She signified it further by moving quickly so that she sat next to me. "And now I want you to know why I sent for you."

"I think I'd better be going, your Ladyship. There are . . ."

"Silence. I sent for you, Reed, to see how you may best serve me. I think I know. You see, there is a little joke you are to play for me." She put her hand on my arm and held her imploring face not three inches from mine. "Please?" Her breath was perfumed. Not unpleasantly.

"A joke, you say? On whom?"

"On my husband. I want you to . . ."

That did it! "Goodby, Alice. See you at the performance." With nasty visions of another man and I prowling about a black hall, swishing at each other with hatchets, I blundered across the bedroom, my eyes frantically studying the walls for hint of exits. Suddenly the room blazed into light, and at that instant my doom was sealed. I turned just in time to have the Lady hurl herself into my arms, her costume in bawdy disarray. A door to our right opened and the young woman who had led me here appeared and leveled a camera.

Alice pushed herself away from me and set about rearranging her clothing. "Very good, Linda. You

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will hide the picture. You will say nothing to anyone until I command you to. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Lady." She retreated as quickly as she had entered.

"And now, my man, shall we talk?"

We talked. What else could I do?

The woman informed me that the pictures would be given me when and if I had fulfilled a certain request. If I did not, well . . . I would not be the first fellow whom the Leader had sliced for showing too little or too much affection for his wife, Alice.

The request was, simply, that I write and present a play during my stay on Lima One that would mock, parody and humiliate the members of the Leader's side of the family.

Alice said she had never liked them. She hoped the play would shame them into leaving.

That evening in my quarters as I gloomily set about the business of rigging the view screens and checking circuits, a virile middle-aged man of fifty or sixty wandered in unannounced. I was in no mood for intruders, especially not this gaunt giant.

"Why don't you knock?" He wore a sword, I then noticed, so I added, "Hello, sir."

"Umph!" For a moment he studied me, then turned to inspect the equipment I had set up. "You J. Marty Reed?"

"Yes, sir. And you?"

He glowered. "I'm the Leader. 'H'dy do."

"Good—Very good, sir. How do *you* do?"

"I'm a patient man," he stated, apropos of nothing I could discern.

"Im sure of that, sir. Have a seat?"

He lowered his long frame into the lounge I had pulled before a view screen. — "And stop that infernal 'sirring'."

"Oh, you bet. Coffee? Venusmoke? Anything?"

"Humph." The Leader began massaging his hands. They were each as large as my head, and terribly scarred. "Reed, I'm a patient man, but I'm getting sick of all this killing in my city. I run a kind and democratic city. Don't hold with sirring and airs, nor did my father. But there are others . . . You know?"

"Oh, yes, others." I gestured weakly.

"*Her* people—sick of them, sick of them. You hunt?"

As the ancients said, I was on the ropes by now. "People? I mean, hunt? Uh . . . no. That is . . ."

"Take you on a good hunt before you leave. Winged snakes. They live over the rim on the bottom side. Take'em with ropes. Good show."

I had seen a snake once when I was a kid. It was an ugly devil about two feet long. The topic definitely did not attract me, but if I could possibly ingratiate myself with this Leader . . . if I could possibly tell him my side of the story before *she* got to him . . .

"Snakes. I once saw a devil of a big snake—five feet long."

For the first time the Leader's hard young face relaxed into a grin, a twisted and horrible sort of grin. "Five feet, you say—well, well, well! Then

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we've really got something for you. The beasts we'll go after are five feet through. Take 'em with ropes."

I reached into a nearby drawer and took out a handful of stim pills which I began eating like candy. They nerved me to change the distasteful subject. "See here, sir, I understand that you expect quite a little crowd at our plays."

"You had much experience, Reed?"

"Hunting?"

"No, plays. You given many?"

Gladly, I launched into the story of my professional career, telling him of my beginnings in California on Earth. My triumphal tour of Australasia. Briefly, I sketched the account of my years and years of popularity, the years before a few embittered and illiterate critics forced me into writing and directing, rather than acting. Then I recounted the new upward climb of J. Marty Reed . . . of the successful tours of Rome and Peiping, of my being a feature attraction at New Capetown, and of Venus, Luna, and most recently, Mars.

The Leader, whatever his barbaric faults, listened to me like a gentleman. "Then you are the man who can help me."

A little wind of fear blew along my neck. "Uh?"

"I'm a patient man, but I can take no more of my wife's relatives. When they go I shall have peace on Lima. I'm willing to set them up on a 'roid of their own . . . at the other end of the Cluster. There can be no happiness nor peace for anyone as long as we live here together. I cannot come right out and make them go, so you . . . in your plays . . . are to mock them and mimic them—hold them up to the light of ridicule. I want them to see their faults as others see them. Then, perhaps, they will be glad to go. You will do this, of course?"

My mouth and I spent the next few minutes attempting to point out to his stubborn lout that his plan was sickly with illogic, that what he proposed could only lead to bloodshed, that . . .

"You will do as I say. You have four days in which to comply. If you do, I shall reward you well. If you do not, you forfeit your landing bond and receive no money for your work."

"But . . ."

"As you yourself have said, you are rich with experience, in both the directing and writing of playlets. This will be no great task for you."

"No, but . . ."

"And besides, I order you to do as I say." The Leader walked to the door. "If you do a really good job I'll let you come hunting *pthors* with me in the caves."

He left.

I ate two more stim pills.

Winged snakes, five feet through the middle! I did not even wish to imagine what a *pthor* was. Whatever the monster, we'd probably hunt it with slings or sharp sticks.

I got up and paced about the room a few times. Surely there must be a solution to this pickle. With a tremendous effort of will I forced myself to consider things calmly. This approach, however, succeeded only in giving me a slower, more thorough depiction of death by handaxe.

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I let go with my anger. Who did this knave of a Leader think he was dealing with, anyway?—A man of no experience?—A callow thespian?—A coward? It was a happy thing for him I had kept my temper during our conversation.

Several lengths of street, and an entire wing of the "castle" had been reserved for our dramas, and it was fortunate that the founders of Lima One had built on a grand scale. Almost two hundred spectators were on hand to observe our performance, but I, trouper that I am, rose to the occasion and rewrote the story while it was being played. There are few other directors in the System who could have done it. The job entailed keeping one eye on the view screens and another on the scripts, while choosing from the three-dimensional model of Lima One the rooms, halls and grounds next to be used. The huge audience made movements extremely unwieldy, and I imagine only those in the front ranks heard anything of the dialogue.

Several times during the performance my eyes would dart to those screens which were rigged to check on audience reaction, I noticed that the Limans were well-armed and paying as much attention to each other as they did to my players.

I cannot truly say it was a successful first night.

That evening (for the atmosphere of Lima One is darkened regularly by ion control) I pleaded a headache, which was certainly true, and instead of attending the festivities in our honor, I slipped from the city and made my way through the gates out to the ship. As a keen judge of character, I knew I could quickly determine whether or not the guard could be bribed . . . for I had been toying with the idea of swift escape. As I neared the dark bulk of the craft there was a fearsome thundering and someone rode up to me atop a horse. A light blazed in my face.

"Your name!"

My name, indeed! I let him know that I was master of the craft he had been set to watch, and that I was not accustomed to having my eyes blinded by the lamps of rude servants.

It proved to be an untactful remark. Hoarse with rage, the mounted man bawled out that he was a brother of the Lady, and that with him rode his son.

Two others trotted up. I was literally ringed by the snorting animals. "What is this?" asked a newcomer.

"It says it owns the ship. It thinks us servants." Laughter, raucous and rude, greeted this, and the one with the light spoke again. "Reed, know that your rusting tub is guarded day and night of your stay by a brother of the Lady and a brother of the Leader. Although why such precautions should be taken I cannot say, for the drive coils of the ship have been removed for safe keeping. So I see no harm in your entering the craft. Do you, inlaws?"

They thought not.

Neither did I.

My troupe and I were here, it appeared, until our task was done.

Mournfully, I wandered across the

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velvety meadow, back into the city.

The following evening we presented a drama that had always been well received—a period piece with much discharging of ancient percussion weapons, hand to hand fights, and several near seductions . . . in short, a clever farce. All went well until Gloria, my leading lady, took her entrance. Swooping down into a courtyard where two struggling men vied for possession of a gun, she parked her flier and ran to the assistance of her "lover." I took up the "mike" that spoke into her left ear . . . the "mike" for giving directions. "Gloria, closer in," I ordered. It was necessary that she play but a few feet from the men, for the appreciative crowd had moved up past the chalked lines of their boundary.

The girl on the screen paused, allowed herself a quick flicker of perplexity. I took this to mean she had forgotten her lines. "Gloria," I repeated, "closer in." Then into the cue mike, the one that spoke into her right ear, I gave her her line: "Your knife, use your knife."

Dutifully, she said, "Closer in," and fumbled at her girdle for her knife.

With horror, I realized what had happened. She had donned each speaker over the wrong ear, and the lines I fed her she was taking for directions; the directions for lines.

"You've got your speakers on backwards," I hissed.

"You've got your speakers on backwards," she repeated. The men adroitly managed to fake wrestling holds while each in turn changed the position of *his* speakers.

Clutching both mikes, I rose before the screen and shrieked, "No, no, you fools! You blundering sophomores. She was the wrong one!"

Both men started shouting, but the older man allowed his opponent to take the speech. "You fools! She . . ." (pointing to Gloria) "she was the wrong one."

They stopped fighting and regarded Gloria. The girl, in complete confusion, took the knife from its sheath and regarded it.

Opening both mikes at once, I said, "Gloria, get in the ship."

"Get in the ship," she said, getting back into the ship. The two men stared stupidly at each other. Then Peter, the older and more experienced, attempted to carry on the new line. "She had us both fooled, friend Shall we go after her?"

The other nodded gladly and followed Peter over to the flier. I yelled with rage. Both men yelled obediently.

Throwing down the two mikes. I took up those to another waiting group . . . three men and a girl. "Hurry out and stop them. Kill them. Do anything."

The screen showed the four dashing from a nearby doorway, guns drawn and barking. There was nothing for the former combatants to do but fall, which broke their chest vials of "blood."

The play was utterly ruined.

But the audience began clapping and whistling. Shouts of approval filled my chambers. So I had the

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three men shoot each other dead, the woman go to the flier, drag out poor confused, weeping Gloria, and "knife" her. There was one woman left. She threw herself on the body of the man, who in the ordinary course of my play would have been her husband, and sobbed hopelessly.

To my utter disgust the audience broke into thunderous applause.

I pounded the stud that rang a gong, the signal that the drama had finished, then turned to look at the pack of Liman fools who could take pleasure and appreciation from such a fiasco as they had just witnessed.

Some of the poor boobs, I swear, were weeping.

An hour later my abashed band of thespians, carefully avoiding each other's eyes, were summoned—along with myself—to an audience with the Leader and his Lady.

They too liked the performance! The Leader advised me to feature more adventures such as this. "And perhaps," he added, "perhaps just one comedy before you leave." He winked slowly, coldly. I knew what he meant. I tore my gaze away and looked at his Lady. She smiled charmingly, but one slender white hand drew a dagger an inch from its jeweled sheath.

I knew what she meant, too.

The mounted guards allowed me into my ship without a word. I made straight for my cabin and over a bottle of fine Martian brandy, I reviewed my life just once more. It had been a good life, short perhaps, for I was only sixty, but good. While there was still time I drank several toasts to it. Then I settled down to a close examination of my predicament. It came to this: I could please the Leader, and be framed to death by his Lady. I could please the Lady and be fed to the flying snakes by the Leader. Or I could please neither of them and incur their combined enmity. Even if I escaped with my life, the troupe and I would be paupers . . . worse than that, I realized, for in lieu of cash to pay the landing bond, I had tendered a thoroughly worthless check—thinking to cover it with our earnings here. *That* would get me at least ten years in the foul, miasmic prison-swamps of Venus—a death hardly preferable to one by hatchet.

Of course, the brandy and I reflected, I could charm the Lady Alice into a coma of desire, duel the Leader to hash, and settle down as the new head of Lima One.

Hah!

Even I knew better. Who did I think I was? Robin Hood? Evvart Grier? Kent Duncan?

Duncan!

The brandy glass dropped to the floor as I stood suddenly. Kent Duncan had settled on Venus, less than a hundred and fifty thousand miles from this ghastly 'roid, and Kent owed me a favor. Hadn't I hidden him amongst the members of my troupe, that time in Capetown when the Yard Patrolmen were searching for him? He'd not only charmed the mayor of Capetown out of a casket of jewels, but charmed the mayor's wife even more piquantly. I, seeing

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in him the same flamboyant qualities that I, myself, possess, had given him asylum.

I rushed to the control room and examined the phones. They had not been locked nor crippled. Trembling, I picked up the dial, managed to dial Bell Venus. The girl there gave me Information and I told her whom I wanted—"Kent Duncan, president or manager or whatever of Duncan's Department Store in Rossville. J. Marty Reed calling, and reverse the charges."

"One moment, please."

As I waited, I became increasingly positive that if anyone could save me it would be Duncan, for although he had recently turned respectable merchant I knew he'd forgotten more about roguery than the wiliest Dominion politician had ever known. Apprenticed to a magician at an early age he had matured into a most skilled and popular entertainer. Such success had left him unsatisfied; he turned to music, and had his ditties not been so bawdy they would have circled the System. As it is, his melodies are often heard whistled in the strangest places—a dock on Mars, a nightclub on Luna, the halls of the Dominion in San Francisco. When Duncan had finally vanished, he was mourned by women from Venus to the rim of the System.

Few knew where he had gone . . . I was one of those few. The man had taken on a disguise, banked his money, and embarked on a vagabond's life; juggling, singing, making love, he traced a roisterous path from continent to continent on Earth, and then, as he grew more confident of his new identity . . . and as the System began to forget him (as they forget even heroes) he voyaged out to the pioneer 'roids, and even to Jupiter and Saturn. Eventually, as with the first Kent Duncan, the second of the new name and face became as well known, and he chose to retire, a few years back, to respectability on Venus . . . the ground of his birth.

"We have your party. Your party accepts the charges. Go ahead please."

Another woman's voice, this time Duncan's secretary, informed me her employer would be free to talk in just a moment.

Then finally, "Reedy! You old ham!"

For a few seconds I was speechless, wracked with relief and nostalgia. "J. Marty Reed, and I am not a ham. Can you talk?"

"Scrambler? Sure. What'll the key be?"

"Do you remember the name of the Mayor's wife in Capetown?"

He said he did, chuckling, and the speaker turned suddenly to solid static. I punched in the letters "L I S A" on my scrambler, and the static vanished. "What's the trouble, Reedy?"

It took me but a few minutes to explain. Duncan seemed vastly amused. "Then you'll come?" I asked.

"I dunno. This Alice, the Lady . . ."

"Yes?"

"Is she pretty?"

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I went into detail.

The following evening, a slim pencil-like craft eased down through the violet sky and settled beside my larger ship. Even as the hot metal of its jets began to tinkle and sing as it cooled, a party of horsemen galloped out to surround the new arrival, and I was forced to wait while the foolish landing formalities were conducted. At last Kent emerged, his tall angular body was wrapped in an orange cloak and his twisted face had the odd blending of the saturnine and the humorous that I had remembered. As I called and waved, he swung himself atop a horse and rode off with a party of the Leader's relatives and henchmen. With some pique I walked after them.

It was not until late that night that Kent Duncan came to me. He'd been detained, he explained, by having first dined with the Leader, and afterwards, taken cocktails with the Lady.

"You mean you know them?"

"Through phone and letter, yes. I've sold them furnishings for the last three years. That very couch you're sprawled on came from my store, and that fireplace, too, I believe." He examined the piece, an oval bed of stone, surmounted by its mask of metal. "It was buff and neutral when it left the store, though. Some tasteless ass on Lima has added the stripes and dots."

I could not repress a smile. Duncan the merchant! Duncan the decorator! Fantastic. An older memory of the man suited him better—the ragged minstrel who'd arrived sweaty and grinning in my quarters one stormy night, stolen jewels and stolen woman with him, after having faced down ten of the city's crack dicks with a crossbow. "So you're utterly respectable at last. I had to hear it from your lips."

He smiled, shrugged noncommittally.

"You *are* respectable, aren't you?"

Again the vague gesture. The implication delighted me: In a land of knaves, the double-dyed knave is king, and if not king, at least priest or chief surgeon. Kent could not fail me.

"Well," I began, pouring myself a glass of wine, "about my spot of trouble. What do you think of it?"

"I haven't given it much thought, but it looks rather hopeless."

"What?" The wine soured in my mouth.

"Exactly, Reedy." He toyed abstractedly with a coin, his skilled fingers making it vanish and reappear. "This 'roid's ripe for a full scale bloodbath. In the past year there have been twelve fatal duels, three poisonings, and several crude 'accidents.' That's just on the Leader's side of the family, and the Lady's relatives have had it about as bad."

"But my God, why don't they just get a divorce and one of them clear out, relatives and all?"

"Too proud. Not only that, he says they're in love. You see, this feud was going on when they married. It began way back in their parents' time. Some wit turned a snake loose in Alice's mother's bath. She couldn't

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see the joke, so she retaliated by having two snakes left in the bed of her brother-in-law, who she was certain was the prankster. Unfortunately, one of the snakes was mildly poisonous. Brother-in-law had to be taken to Mars for treatment. By that time, sides were chosen—even among the servants and workers—and the quarrel was well into its dueling stage."

Grudgingly, I expressed admiration for the speed with which Kent had become informed on the matter. I asked how he had managed it.

"It was nothing, really. Linda, the lady's personal girl . . . I spent a while with her after leaving Alice." He smiled pleasantly, flipped the coin into the air. It did not fall back down.

For a few seconds I peered into the ceiling's gloom, automatically attempting to fathom how it had vanished. Then as Kent idly produced it from his pocket, my irritation returned. How could he be so glib, so utterly unconcerned in the face of the disaster that confronted us. I asked him this.

"Confronts you," he corrected. "But don't worry, Reedy old ham, you've got two more days to produce. Something will turn up."

Nothing turned up by the next evening. Kent, far from worrying about my plight, appeared to be enjoying himself tremendously. The medieval style of Lima One charmed him. He rode out in the morning to hunt with the Leader, spent the afternoon showing the Lady the latest dance steps from Venus and Luna. That evening, after my troupe had romped noisily through a gun-happy thriller, he proceeded to entertain all comers in the central cocktail hall with songs and bits of magic. One day to go!

For an hour, I tried to make him come with me to talk, but neither he nor his audience would have it. Miserably, I retired to my quarters. For another hour I brooded until my eye fell on a hatchet that hung on the wall with other ancient weapons.

I took it down. There seemed no other solution.

Turning off the lights, I practiced creeping about the room, hiding here, darting forward there, slashing furiously at shadows.

Five minutes later I turned the lights back on.

There had to be some other solution. There just had to!

When Kent finally arrived, I explained this to him. He wasn't so sure. "Anyway, Reedy, this isn't such a bad way to go." He examined the hatchet. "I've seen the Leader's collection of dueling weapons. His hatchets are wonderfully keen. I doubt if one could tell the precise moment one . . . lost something."

"A great friend you are, Duncan." Bitterly, I reminded him how I had once sheltered him, risking not only my reputation, but my liberty as well. "And instead of helping me," I concluded, "you loaf about swilling drinks with these savages and singing them your little songs."

Kent put down the hatchet. "Exactly. I kept enough of the Lady's followers in the lounge tonight to

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stop the trouble from becoming worse."

"Trouble?"

He nodded. "A niece of the Lady kicked the Leader's great aunt. Happened during your drama. A little later, great aunt's son shoved the Leader's uncle into a moat. Uncle climbed out, got a couple of friends, and went looking for trouble. That's why I kept everyone I could in the lounge till uncle got cold and went home. Linda told me what was up."

I attempted to pour wine for us. Kent took the decanter from my shaking hand and did the service. For a while he watched my misery in silence. Then at last he laughed, tossed off his drink. "Reedy, I've got an idea." He jumped to his feet. strode excitedly about the room. "It just might work." Taking up the hatchet, he hurled it against the far wall where it stuck squarely between two hanging swords. "You may not have to use that after all."

I didn't see him again till after lunch the following day. When I pressed for explanations, he answered that he'd been in his ship overnight, phoning his home and writing. "I have written a play. 'Written' isn't quite the right word, I suppose, but I'll let it serve."

"A play?" My new found hopes drained and vanished. "Oh, excellent! I have one night left to breathe, and you have written a play. Perhaps you've painted some pictures, too, or tossed off some songs?"

Kent ignored my agony. "How quickly do your players memorize?"

"As quickly as any. A day for each hour of playing."

He left the table, walked thoughtfully across the room. "Not fast enough. I could cut, I suppose, but . . . Call your group together right now, Reedy. We haven't much time. I'll give them a synopsis and we'll trust to luck tonight. Do they improvise business well?"

I nodded. "But . . ."

"Call them. Hurry!"

On the crowd screens I watched nervously as the Leader's party formed into a tight and well-armed knot. Across the square, another group collected its members. The two bands eyed each other frigidly, their hands held casually near hilt and holster.

It was almost time. Kent and I seated ourselves before the main player's screens, with plenty of coffee and tobacco at hand. Our scripts and mikes stood ready before us. At last my players whispered from their speakers that they were at their places and ready.

I looked at Kent, and smiled bravely.

He nodded.

I pressed the stud for the starting gong.

"No players on till the lights go down and up," Kent said. "Understood?"

A whispered murmur of assent issued from the speakers.

Kent put down the cue mikes, picked up the one wired to address the crowd, and began reading from his script: "Two households, both alike in dignity, in fair Verona, where

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we lay our scene, from ancient grudge break to new mutiny, where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes a pair of star-crossed lovers take their life; whose misadventured piteous overthrows do with their death bury their parent's strife."

I turned the lights down and up as Kent cut his mike, snatched up another. "One and two, on stage."

Two of my players emerged from a doorway and strolled into the arena. The audience was ominously silent and intent. Kent nodded to me and we began feeding lines to those players assigned us. They repeated beautifully, with barely a second's lag between our words and theirs.

As the drama unfolded I again lost heart. Certainly such a tale as this could only lead to bloodshed; it concerned two noble families . . . as much alike the Leader's and the Lady's as Kent had dared to draw them. My players fought in the first five minutes of drama, and I trembled lest excitement and empathy involve the glowering mob that watched.

But there was more than fighting in Kent's play. Busy as I was with the tasks of feeding lines and directions and standby cues, there was a critical portion of my mind that stood back and took notice of the singular beauty of some passages. For instance in one scene, the hero, Romero, stands beneath the window of the woman he loves. He says: "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Julie is the sun! Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, who is already sick and pale with grief . . ." A curious, yet not unattractive rhythm to the words, I thought. And a moment later, in the same scene, the girl Julie, says, "O Romero, Romero, wherefore art thou Romero? Deny your father and refuse your name; Or, if you will not, be but sworn my love, and I'll no longer be a Coy."

A nice sentiment, I had to admit. In addition to being a scoundrel and a tunester and a magician, Kent Duncan seemed to have some talent for scribbling. I made up my mind to let him know I might tutor him if he wished.

As the story line became more involved, I noticed the audience had softened somewhat. No longer did they divide their attention between my players and the members of the other faction across the way. Instead, they seemed to hang onto every scrap of dialogue, following curiously each new sorrow of the play as it unfolded.

It was a terribly tragic thing Kent had written. There was this young Romero Martin, and he was in love with Julie Coy. Their families were at war with each other, just like the Leader's and the Lady's. The two families liked nothing better than to dash about sticking each other, so there was sufficient obstacle in the lover's way to make way for drama. Finally, a kind minister had enough of the killing, so he told Julie to drink a certain drug which he gave her. It was supposed to bring on a sort of suspended animation. Then, when her family buried her, Romero

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was to sneak into the crypt and flee with her.

But something fouled up: A servant phoned Romero that Julie was dead. Romero rushed to the vault in his flier, killed a fellow who attempted to bar his way, then went in to his beloved, whom, to him, appeared to be dead.

I confess that I shed a tear when young Romero knelt beside the sleeping Julie and said: "Death, that has sucked the honey of your breath, has had no power yet upon your beauty. You are not conquer'd . . . beauty's ensign yet is crimson in your lips and in your cheeks, and death's pale flag is not advanced there."

For the first time during the play our audience became audible. I was not the only one who had been moved. These wicked savages, burdened with their swords and guns, were sniffling and blowing their noses. And as Romero, waving his gun in the air, shouted, "Here's to my love. O true apothecary! Your drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss, I die . . ." the audience began yelling that Julie was not really dead, but my actor taking no notice, put the gun to his temple and "shot" himself.

The report awakened Julie, and my actress . . . knowing that the lines I fed her would not be heard amidst the lamentations of the crowd, simply clasped her dead lover to her breast, then took his still smoking gun and did away with herself.

There was to have been more to the play, but when Kent heard the new expression of grief that welled up from the spectators, he closed his script and cued the waiting actors offstage to vanish.

"I think that about does it, Reedy," he said pointing to the large crowd screen at our right. I looked up and saw . . . could it be possible? I saw the Lady's mother, hanky to her face, rush across the courtyard and awkwardly embrace the Leader.

"And that, friend," said Kent, "is a cease-fire signal in any society. Even Lima One."

Well, Heral, I believe I have told you about all there is. The Leader, rather sheepishly admitted that what I had done was a far better thing than the spiteful lampooning he had requested. He stated that there would be peace on Lima One, for a while, at least, and he rewarded me with twice the money specified in the contract.

The Lady said virtually the same thing, save that her reward consisted of a delightful kiss . . . a reward I deemed advisible to quickly return to her. She also turned over to me the incriminating photo. Instead of destroying this, I intend to have it enlarged and framed, once we arrive at New Ellay, for it is not every man who can claim to have wooed such a lovely vixen, and with such a disregard of his personal safety. (Secretly, I believe the Lady Alice rather fancies me. Would that the coming engagement in California could be put off . . .)

And Kent? Kent intends to remain for a while on Lima. A vacation, he termed it — Vacation, indeed! —

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Snakes and pthors and riding on horses. But then, Kent has always liked such things. My last view of him, was that of him sitting comfortably in the saddle atop a huge black male horse . . . the Lady riding close beside him. He is a fabulous character, Heral, and though he claims to be now but a simple merchant, I know that he uses his store on Venus as a respectable cloak for his frequent "vacations."

Regards
J. Marty Reed

THE END

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THE JOB IS ENDED

By WILSON TUCKER

He had a lifetime job here on Earth—to find an unnamed person. There were no clues; no hints as to identity; not even that he was human! Failure meant disaster to our Earth.

THE moment I saw Marie Jackson I knew I was finished. At last, a thirty year search was over, a suspicious man's theory had become a fact, and a laboratory problem was solved. Marie Jackson brought it to a close.

Strangely enough, it was her husband who had betrayed her to me, and gave me the first hint that the job was nearing its finish.

The secondary discovery was as strange as the first and was the one thing I had not been expecting. Marie Jackson was a woman . . . I had been searching for a man. For thirty years I had been hunting down a man, any man who happened to fit the specifications of a laboratory theory. My instructions from Brigham in Washington had been to search for a man who didn't belong, who, if he *did* fit the specifications, would prove that the theory was an actual fact and that Earth did have a visitor. Instead of a man I turned up Marie Jackson, and I made ready to close the case.

Arthur Jackson wandered into my office one warm June day wearing his troubles on his face.

A second look revealed that he wasn't merely having domestic troubles, but was drowning his miseries. It was in his walk, it hung from his shoulders, and it preyed on his mind constantly. He failed to see my outstretched hand—I don't believe he saw *me* very clearly. He sat down across the desk from me and ran a palm over his moist forehead. Nashville in the summer was insufferably hot, but Jackson was suffering from more than the heat.

He was well dressed, though his suit was wrinkled, and he crushed a hat in his hand. He wasn't soft by any measure, he had no paunch, his fingers were long and sure, and the nails reasonably clean. His eyes were intelligent enough behind the blanket of worry, and his hairline was beginning to recede. Jackson wore a small *ACT* pin in his lapel, which was what tipped me off that he was an Oak Ridge man. The American Chemical Trust runs things out there for the government.

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Illustration by Jon Arfstrom

Finally he looked me straight in the eye. "People say you're pretty reliable, Mr. Evans."

I shrugged and waited.

"I read about you in the papers a few Sundays ago," he continued.

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"That was why I came to you. The papers said you had never lost a case, Mr. Evans. That is, they said you have found every man you've ever hunted."

"Sunday supplement stuff," I told him.

"But it *is* true?" he persisted.

"Reasonably so," I nodded. "Those I couldn't locate later proved to be dead."

"I'm having trouble, Mr. Evans," he said uselessly. "The paper — well, perhaps it *was* melodramatic, but it claimed your deductive powers were uncanny. Pardon me, Mr. Evans — it said you could almost read minds. You would have to be a mind reader to find my wife!"

I smiled at him in modest depreciation. "You know the newspapers, Mr. Jackson." I paused for the right length of time. "How much do you want to tell me?"

He stared up at me again, directly into my eyes. The words rushed out eagerly.

"Everything, I want to tell you everything, Mr. Evans, but you probably won't believe me. *They* didn't."

"Who didn't?"

"My doctor, and a psychiatrist recommended by the doctor." He pulled out a handkerchief to wipe his forehead. "I went to the doctor first because I grew up in the habit of taking everything to my doctor. I could have saved myself the trouble," he added bitterly.

"And the psychiatrist?" I prodded gently.

"Practically the same. A mild neurosis, he told me. Said I would probably be completely happy in a matriarchy, but there was nothing to worry about. He did assure me that I was reasonably sane — I suppose I should be thankful for that."

"And so," I put in, "you turned to me."

"Yes — " he was staring at me intently. "Will you do me a favor, Mr. Evans, a very great favor?"

"If I am able, yes."

"Please — "the words came tumbling out again. "Don't laugh at me. Don't laugh at what I have to tell you. Don't pat my shoulder and tell me I am imagining things, that I need a long rest. If you choose not to believe me, I'll leave. Refuse my case and stop right there. But don't laugh."

"That much is easily granted. Where are you going to begin?"

"With my wife. Everything begins with my wife — and ends there, I'm afraid. She's —" he hesitated, stole a glance at me, and finished, "she's too damned smart!"

He waited for my reaction but I showed none.

"Have you ever had the misfortune to marry a woman far more intelligent than yourself, Mr. Evans?"

I shook my head. "Not married."

He rushed on. "You can imagine what a man desires in a woman. Among other things, the usual physical things, he wants a smart and intelligent wife, a woman possessing mental abilities sufficient to understand him and his world. A woman who can stride along with him, and understand his problems. But still, and this is a paradox I'll admit, a

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woman necessarily inferior to him — the least bit inferior, sort of a balance of ego. A man wants a woman who needs his advice, who needs to lean on him, who needs his greater reasoning powers. That is the kind of woman every healthy man desires, Mr. Evans. I thought I had found such a woman in Marie."

I stared past him out the window, at the sunlit street and an idea formed in my mind. "How old is your wife?" I asked him, and his answer was my first clue to her, although it went unrecognized as such, right then.

"We don't know, really." He seemed embarrassed. "She is an orphan and we couldn't locate a birth registration — the situation stirred up a bit of a fuss when I started with the Manhattan people as they looked into everything, you know. Marie and I agreed when we married that she was about five years younger than myself." He paused in thought. "That would make her thirty-two now . . . we think. Sometimes I'm not sure. She hasn't grown much older than the day — Her physical appearance bears that out, Mr. Evans. Thirty-two."

I knew that to be a half-truth for he wasn't sure in his own mind. "And you?" I asked. "You're a success in your field?"

He absently fingered the lapel pin and nodded. Jackson told me about himself, about Manhattan in the days before we got into the war, and afterward: About Oak Ridge now and his position there, the full, fruitful years of his life; about the growing unhappiness and strain between himself and his wife, about his striving to overcome it. He wound up by asserting, "I consider myself an intelligent man, Mr. Evans. You'll grant me that, leaving false modesty aside."

I agreed without quibbling. "Easily granted." He had told me far more than he realized and I could honestly agree with the statement. "But now — back to your wife?"

"Yes, my wife."

He lapsed into what must have been a painful silence for him and his mind skittered back over those years, tracing the early ripening of his love for her. He made it easy for me to follow him although I was careful to give no outward sign of that; I waited patiently for him to speak. I saw him as a young man holding down a modest-paying position, a young man with reasonable security, a future, and a desire — the not unnatural desire to find a wife to share that future. He discovered Marie in a library.

"In the evenings after work," he finally broke the silence, "I studied the technical books and journals I could not yet afford. I wanted to climb as rapidly and as safely as possible and I realized that if I waited until I could afford those books, it might be too late.

"I met her in the library. She was looking at a schematic drawing in an early radio journal, tracing it with her finger. It startled me when I looked closely to see what she was really doing, and at the same time it pleased me. You must realize it was — and is — very unusual to find a woman interested in such things; I stood behind her chair and watched

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her finger. She went along splendidly for a few moments and then ran into trouble.

"I don't recall now what it was, but it threw her entirely off the track and caused her to lose the thread of thought as well. I could determine that much by the way she reacted. When you lose the thought behind a schematic you may as well start over again." He paused to look at me.

"I understand what you mean. Go on."

He continued. "Well — She pushed the journal away with a whispered exclamation of annoyance and started to get up. And I, like a damned fool, had to butt in; I leaned over her shoulder and pointed to the trouble spot.

"No, *this* way," I remember saying to her impulsively, and then I stopped and could say no more. She threw me one withering glance over her shoulder and I hurriedly left the library, in some confusion I must admit. She disturbed me."

"Was it an act?", I wanted to know.

"Act? You mean, was she pretending? No, I don't think so. She was an utter stranger to me. I avoided the library on the following night because I still felt some embarrassment, but on the third evening an overpowering desire to see her again swept away any misgivings I may have had. The desire amounted almost to a pull, a compulsion. She still disturbed me."

I pricked up my ears and senses. I was beginning to learn things about Jackson's wife.

He said, "I went back to the library . . . "

" . . . and there she was," I finished for him. He misinterpreted me, and thought I was asking a question.

"Yes. I found her studying a book I had turned in only a few weeks previously. It was a field closely allied to my own, can you understand that? It had not been easy going for me but there she sat, working through it. I was astonished and I was delighted — and although I carefully avoided her that evening and continued to do so for several nights thereafter, eventually . . . well, Mr. Evans, eventually the attraction to her overcame my reticence. I can't explain it more clearly."

"No need," I assured him. "Easily understandable, and it happens all the time. Mutual interest in your sciences, each of you obviously alone —" I let it hang there.

"He nodded. "Yes, yes, I finally summoned up my courage, approached her and introduced myself. She was not angry." He closed his eyes, dreaming. "In time we became fast friends. We met there several times, and elsewhere. In a very short while I began to entertain ideas. Frankly, they surprised me for up until that moment I had been rather shy where women were concerned, but Marie's presence seemed to invite ideas."

I'll just bet — I said to myself.

"I thought," he went on without a pause, "she was — or rather she would be — what any intelligent man might call a perfect wife. She was endowed with everything I could ask

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in a mate, including the remarkable intelligence I desired in my dream woman. I . . . I may as well make this brief. We were married."

I turned from the window to face the man. He was looking at me, waiting for my reaction thus far.

"Jackson," I said, throwing it at him, "you were hooked."

"Uh . . . hooked?"

"Hooked," I nodded without a smile, "but don't be alarmed, *that* goes on all the time, too. A million women employ a million ways to *hook* a million men. Quite common."

He wasn't alarmed at my words, he merely went off on another dream train. His voice trailed off and drifted back across the years to their marriage.

He married her because he was madly in love with her, with her body, her beauty, her soul and her intelligence quotient. He married her because he would have something few other men could boast — an alert, brainy woman who was practically his equal in any field he chose to explore. He married her because she could read a schematic, *but* ran into trouble on certain parts of it. That iota of necessary inferiority was there. He married her because she would be a valuable asset to his own standing and mentality. And somewhere along the line, between the honeymoon and the present day, the glorious bubble burst. I saw it blow up in his face as he relived it in his mind.

"Which brings us to the present," I reminded him, jolting him out of his silence.

"Yes," he echoed bitterly, "the present. Mr. Evans, I love my wife."

You are a liar, I said to him, but *not* aloud. He didn't *love* his wife anymore, it was something else now, something akin to love but definitely not affection. However, I said nothing, it wouldn't do for me to call his cards.

"Still married?" I prodded.

He nodded unhappily.

"Exactly why did you come to me?" I demanded of him.

Arthur Jackson stared at me. I had forced the crisis on him and had already read his answer, but still had to wait for his torrent of words.

"Because Marie has surpassed me," he almost cried, "out-stripped me because she is an unimaginable distance ahead." He held up a hand. "No — please, don't mistake me. I'm not mad, not angry, I'm jealous, yes, terribly jealous. But all that aside, Mr. Evans, she won't let me see her."

"Other men?" I wanted to know.

"I don't know; I suppose so. She has moved out of our home and lives at some hotel. These other men — if they exist — I've never seen them, I can only suspect they exist. But that isn't what is bothering me. I can't *see* her!"

I caught something there which was startling.

"What was that?"

"Mr. Evans, in the many years we lived together, Marie sucked my mind of knowledge like a bat sucks blood. Everything I've learned in the past ten years she *knew* the following day! I would spend weeks working through a technological problem and she would

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know the full answer in one evening at the dinner table. I just couldn't keep anything from her."

"Wait a moment," I cut in impatiently, "let's get back to your first statement. What do you mean, you can't see her?"

"Mr. Evans — " he groped in a mental darkness, stammering. "Mr. Evans, you won't believe me, but — well, Marie blanks out."

I couldn't pretend that didn't shake me, couldn't hide my reaction from him. The shock reflected on my face. He was watching that face for disbelief, but whatever else he found there, it wasn't disbelief. Even though his earlier conversation had prepared me by laying the foundations, this was still a jolt. A jolt curiously marked with wonder, plus the birth of desire.

So Marie Jackson "blanks out." How very interesting. She did not have a birth certificate, and she knew every single thing that passed across her husband's mind — literally. After thirty years, I was near the end.

"Tell me how she does it," I suggested.

He only laughed hollowly. "If I knew that would I have gone to a doctor?"

"But explain yourself. *Blanks out.* How?"

"I honestly don't know, Mr. Evans. I suppose there is a — I *know* there is a logical explanation. I'm not superstitious, a believer in black magic and such nonsense. Some of the things we do and have done in the laboratory would startle a layman out of his senses, but behind every phenomena there is an orderly procession of facts." He sighed. "Mr. Evans, I only wish I could understand such an effect."

"How did you discover this . . . uh, effect?"

"It was just after she moved out of the house. I tried to see her, to talk things over, to ask her to come back. She left orders not to admit me and refused my phone calls. I began following her but she soon discovered me, and when she did, she simply blanked out."

"You mean . . . vanished?"

He nodded in despair. "Vanished — in mid-air, in the middle of the sidewalk, not half a block ahead of me. She didn't so much as turn around to look at me, to see if I was there. She *knew* I was there — and disappeared."

"Doorways?"

"No, I thought of that; I've thought of a hundred things. Who wouldn't when the unexplainable happens? No, it was not a doorway. In the middle of the sidewalk, I told you. It happened time and time again; crossing a street, sitting on a park bench, oh, just anywhere." He looked at me helplessly.

"How many times?" I wanted to know.

"Six, maybe seven. Then I visited my doctor, and the psychiatrist, and then I came to you because now I never see her at all. I've waited outside her hotel until I'm afraid of the patrolman on the beat, but she never, never allows me to see her any more."

I got down to business.

"In exact words, Mr. Jackson, what

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do you want me to do?"

"Find her! *See* her. Talk to her. Tell her I . . . I *must* see her again. Just once more."

I didn't like that last answer. "You want me to attempt a reconciliation?" I questioned.

He fell over himself in eager assent — in words. But he was a little too eager for my peace of mind.

"If not," I said, "then arrange a divorce?"

"Oh, no, no, Mr. Evans. Never that. I would never divorce Marie. I tell you, I love her, Mr. Evans."

That wasn't all of his complaint by any means, that was only the curtain raiser. Arthur Jackson spent a full two hours in my office that afternoon, crying on my shoulder. He told me his wife had always been a remarkable woman, that she was extraordinarily intelligent, and that her mind was so keen as to grasp whole problems before the verbal recital of the initial facts was fully presented.

"I can't keep anything from her!" he cried once, and went on to explain. She knew everything he knew, and more. She could fill his job or the jobs of any of his superiors, and that, to Arthur Jackson, was frightening because he was working on the most secret of government projects.

I thought I understood, he was unable to continue living with her and yet he lacked the will to give her up. One doesn't so easily part with a prize, even though that prize becomes increasingly hard to understand and manage. Could a moron mate with a savant, even when the moron was a brilliant atomic specialist in his own right?

Arthur Jackson had been an engineer in the Manhattan Project since the summer of 1940. He had also acquired a wife in the summer of 1940, although if he but realized the truth, the wife had acquired him. He now lived in Nashville and divided his time between his home here, and Oak Ridge.

Nashville was as close as *I* could get to Oak Ridge without raising suspicion. Of what earthly use were private detectives in a city like Oak Ridge, private detectives whose backgrounds could not stand investigation?

Long before that two hour interview with Jackson had ended I learned a pair of startling facts from him, although he never mentioned either of them aloud. He had aroused my suspicions concerning his wife, to be sure, suspicions which caused me to speculate on what Brigham had told me those many years ago in Washington. But they were as nothing compared to these solid facts.

Jackson tried to guard his mind during our conversation, not from me, as I knew he did not suspect me, but from force of habit from spending ten years with his wife. It was futile. He had kept no secrets from his wife and he kept none from me.

I learned first that Marie Jackson possessed a machine in a suitcase. Jackson thought of it that way because he had never been allowed more than a glimpse of it. To him it was just a gray, shapeless mass of ma-

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chinery which fitted into a suitcase that was always locked. For years he had been curious about that little machine, and now, suddenly I was too.

Secondly, I learned from him that the United States had begun research on a hydrogen bomb out there at Oak Ridge long before public announcements were made that the government was merely considering it. This was a subtle bit of strategy in itself. The first actual bomb was near completion while Congress was still debating on whether the nation should start research on it!

Arthur Jackson was key man on the project.

The shock of that nearly showed on my face, but the man before me was too overwrought to see my face. He was still protesting his undying love for his wife.

Like hell you do! You're lying, Arthur Jackson, and you don't love her — not any more, you don't. Fear has got you by the heart and jealousy by the guts. Hatred is tearing your fine intelligence right out of your skull. Your wife has left you behind like a ship sailing from a pier, and if you ever get Marie Jackson in your gunsight, you're a widower.

"All right," I said aloud, "I'll take the case. I'll try to find Mrs. Jackson for you."

The relief and gratitude on his face and in his mind was a physical thing. "I knew you would," he cut loose on me. "The paper said you were a miracle man, they said you could find absolutely anybody, they said — "

I cut him short. "A lot of eyewash. I happen to be as far advanced in my field as you are in yours. The newspaper writers add the fancy touches."

"But you *do* have a remarkable record."

"I do. And doubtless you do too. If you'll leave your address and telephone number with the girl, I'll have something to report in a few days. The retainer fee is thirty dollars."

He left. And in a short while I closed my office.

I spotted Marie Jackson in the hotel lobby.

I felt old and tired, washed up, like a horse put to pasture or a general put on the pension list. It was almost finished — my thirty year job was as good as done. There remained only the necessary steps to close the case: make absolutely sure the woman was the one I had been seeking, and after that to mail in my report, and the job was ended. I would be on my own.

Marie Jackson came out of the elevator dressed for the street. She was a knock-out! Tall, as beautiful as a storybook queen, magnificent breasts and long, striking legs. She paused by the lobby newsstand, but didn't look at the papers. Dusk had fallen. Marie Jackson was searching the sidewalk outside the hotel for her husband. He wasn't there of course as he was at home waiting for my call. She seemed surprised at his absence and walked out regally through the door which was held open for her. Without a glance she struck off down the street.

I followed her, marvelling that a jealous husband had put me on the

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trail, but I still had that empty feeling now that the trail was nearly ended.

We hadn't gone many blocks through the brightly-lighted district before I stumbled onto something else, something that I had been half-expecting. Her husband had put it in a very literal way. He had said: "She sucks my mind of knowledge like a bat sucks blood." Marie Jackson was doing that now. She reached out to touch the minds of those around her seeking knowledge.

Sometimes she paused here and there, not long and not often, to sweep across their minds like my eyes swept her attractive figure.

She kept this up for the better part of three hours, going up and down streets, in and out of the park, on crowded busses, in a theater lobby, always searching, touching briefly and going on. She was finding nothing she didn't already know. I finally got tired of it and I had what I wanted for my report.

We passed a drugstore which had a pay phone. I went in and called Arthur Jackson.

"Did you find her?" he cried out immediately. "What did she say? Will she come back? Can I see her?"

"Hold on a minute," I choked him off. "I've found her, yes, but I haven't caught up with her yet. I must see her do this 'blank-out' act, and then I'll close in. You've got to help me."

He was all eagerness to help.

"Get a cab," I instructed him. "Cruise down Charlotte Avenue past those two theaters. She's mixing with the crowd. I want you to think of her — I said *think*. Think hard. Think about finding her there on the street. She'll know you're coming, and she'll get away from the crowd. When she's in a safe place she'll pull the act. I'll be watching."

He agreed, and I left the drugstore. A minute or so later and I would have run into her as I came out the door. She had turned and was coming back along the block. I struck out ahead of her, letting her follow me. I saw to it that she did *not* touch my thoughts.

This should be interesting. I hoped that Marie Jackson wouldn't disappoint me now that the chase was at an end, hoped she was fast enough to protect herself. I couldn't afford to have anything happen to her now, couldn't let that silly ass of a husband put an end to her. The CroMagnon men in their age had taken adequate care of the Neanderthal, yes, but wasn't it safe to assume that every once in a while the brute force struck first, and fatally?

I came to the mouth of an alley and paused. The alley was fairly dark and was deserted except for a pair of scavenger cats midway down. A large telephone pole, which held some kind of transformer in a locked, square case, promised sanctuary. I slid into the alley and lodged myself behind the pole, and waited.

Marie Jackson passed the mouth of the alley, still continuing her search. A part of her conciousness flicked past me, touched the cats briefly, evoking a snarling yowl. She passed from sight but I kept a careful

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contact, alert to flash a warning if she somehow missed her oncoming husband. She didn't. It was a distinct pleasure to watch her glide into action.

While Arthur Jackson's cab was still three minutes away she caught his thought. She also saw he packed a gun.

She suddenly stopped, glanced casually around, and again saw the mouth of the alley. Retracing her steps without visible hurry she gained the alley and turned into its concealing darkness. Then she did it. . . . disappeared! . . . "blanked out" as her husband called it. I was the only one watching. It was smooth. I found myself wishing I knew how it was done.

I kept her spotted by her thoughts, and thus pin-pointed her against a brick wall. She was completely invisible to the naked eye, mine or any other, but she had grown foolishly careless. She failed to hide her thoughts, and in the darkness of that alleyway the mental aura stood out like a neon glow. She stood with her back to the wall and waited for her husband, concealed from him but not from me. She did not fully protect herself by all the means at her command, and the Boss would want to know that and would be surprised when my report came in.

The cab crept slowly along the street, past the mouth of the alley and moved on out of our field of view. Marie Jackson watched it quietly. Her husband was leaning out the window, searching for her among the crowds on the sidewalk. He was looking for Marie — and for me. The crazy fool was looking for me! He supposed that when he saw me, she would be not far ahead.

Damn his rotten soul, he betrayed me to the woman!

She jerked around and moved away from the wall, puzzled and alarmed at this new element. Marie stepped to the alley entrance to search, stared up and down the street seeking me. Her thoughts were a chaotic frenzy and for seconds she defeated her own purpose, trying to find me by sight alone.

Damn Arthur Jackson and his weak mind, damn that stupid moron for revealing me. She flashed after him, caught his memory and scoured it for my description. Getting that, she again searched the street for me, in vain.

It was then that she began to think, to use her brain. She stopped trying to find me by sight alone and fell back on her mental powers. I blanked my mind, thought nothing, waited to see what she might do. My instructions had been not to reveal my presence, my mission, if at all possible. If for any reason I should be caught, I was on my own and had to get out the best way I could. I either ended my search and mailed in a report, or I ended my search and was prevented from mailing in a report. Either way, my success was obviously clear.

Marie had her back to the wall, thinking, analyzing. It had finally struck home and was like a bolt of lightning to her. She suddenly real-

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ized I was not to be found among that crowd on the street, that I was somewhere else not *in sight*. I was not in sight, and yet I was there. Her husband's anxious, fearful mind told her all that.

Belatedly that smashed home to her and she did what she should have been doing all along. She closed up her mind to outsiders and shut off that tell-tale glow of mental activity. She vanished from me.

I did nothing, I thought nothing. I waited motionless behind the telephone pole, concealed from her sight and from her prying mind. She could not catch me unless she caught my thought, or unless she moved deeper into the alley and came abreast of the pole. We were two invisible bodies in the darkness, two tightly-wrapped minds hiding our heads from each other. I knew where I was but I no longer knew where she might be.

Then the stinking cats loused it up. I had forgotten the cats and did not realize they were so near. They had worked their way up the alley. Her unseen presence frightened them and my quite visible body behind the pole annoyed them. I offered them a tangible means of expressing their nerves, so the nearest one arched its back, hissed, then clawed at me. It might as well have flashed a light on me.

I was done unless I acted fast, and the only defense I knew was a fast offense.

Without speaking aloud, I said, "Hello, Marie."

There was no answer.

I sent another thought. "Come on out, I see you."

That did it. "You can't!" she flashed at me, and the thought revealed her position and also the fact that she was frightened . . . of me!

"Oh, but I can. You're there, against the wall."

After a short silence, she asked, "Who are you?"

Who was I? I stared at her in concealed astonishment.

What the hell, did she expect me to come right out and admit the truth? Did she expect me to give myself away so readily? Yes, she apparently did, so I answered and lied to her.

"I'm another, Marie, another like yourself." I directed a pointed thought toward the starry heavens, hiding from her the false base of the thought. "From up there."

Even her responding gasp reached me on the mental line.

She was frightened, damned frightened and her reaction plainly revealed it. It puzzled me — I was the expendable who was supposed to get away from one of *them* the best way I could should I be caught, and yet she was frightened of me! It didn't make sense. I waited for her to reply.

To all inward and outward appearance I was exactly like herself. If she could walk the earth in the guise of a human, as Brigham had suspected the visitors could, then she had no reason to believe that I was not doing the same. If she could probe into minds, could skim the intelligences of earthlings, then it was quite apparent to her that I was doing the same, here and now. We had looked into each other's minds and had seen only

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what was open for display, so it should have followed that we were both of the same kind, both of the same origin. Yet she was scared of me.

Brigham was the boss, the man I sent my reports to. I had seen him just once when my job was explained to me. He gave me a sum of money and instructed me as to the search, only he'd supposed it would be in the form of a man and I had automatically accepted the supposition. Yet it was a woman, calling herself Marie Jackson.

"Marie . . . " I questioned.

"What do you want?"

"That was a dirty trick to play on your husband."

She said again, "Who are you?"

"My name is Evans," I said patiently, and quickly covered up with, "here on this world I am called Evans. And you are Marie Jackson."

"What are you going to do?" she asked fearfully, and I realized something else that she had attempted to hide, but failed. She really meant, what was I going to do *to her!* Me! An ordinary mortal watchdog, endowed with only one super-human power, *telepathy*. And now that I had caught an other-worldly visitor, one of the suspected interlopers from a neighboring planet, what was *I* going to do to *her?* I'm damned if it made sense.

I slipped, I let my mind-shield loosen without my realizing it, and I thought to myself, I wish Brigham were here.

"Brigham!" she cried out instantly.

I tightened up again, instantly alert. She knew his name all right. The familiarity was in her tone and mind.

"What about Brigham?" I demanded.

"Do you . . . do you know him?"

"Yes," I admitted cautiously.

"Brigham," she persisted, "in Washington? Gray hair, left ear partly torn away? Brigham, who offered a job — ?"

"Jehosophat!" I was astounded. "Not you too?"

She stepped away from the wall, the fear vanishing. "Yes. Are you one of Brigham's agents, too?"

And there it was. In the next few seconds in that dark alley, while the betraying cats scuttled away to safety, the beginning of it came out. We were both working for the same man, both watching for the same thing, and each of us had mistaken the other for an alien.

It was a ridiculous situation and yet had apparently come about because Brigham simply followed secret government procedure when hiring his agents, and had not informed either one there was already another in the field. I asked her if she wanted a drink, which she did, and we left the alley.

We were sitting in a small, cozy booth in the darkened rear of a cocktail lounge, a place well away from the theater district. Now, of all times, we had no desire for her husband to find us.

"Why did you marry him?" I asked her.

"Why, to keep watch, of course." She frowned. "Where else but near

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his laboratories would *they* be found?"

"I've never found one yet," I admitted.

"Nor have I. Do you suppose we ever shall?"

I shrugged. "Brigham thinks so, and there is every evidence of it. Especially since the papers began reporting these 'flying saucers.' If Brigham is right, sooner or later one of those aliens will turn up in a vital spot and we'll have him."

"I don't like it," she replied, and lapsed into telepathy. The place was noisy despite its quiet location. "I accepted the job because it seemed the best thing to do, but I don't like it. It frightens me."

I sought her hand, and held it.

"It's funny," I said, "how Brigham tried to make me believe he was an individual, hiring me on his own initiative and out of his own pocket, just to investigate a pet theory of his."

"I caught that, too!" Marie answered. "And all the time I glimpsed in his mind just who was putting up the money, who was actually beginning the investigation. Do you suppose he forgot we could read his mind?"

"One of those idiotic lapses," I laughed. Thirty years ago Brigham had put the proposition up to me and asked me if I wanted the job. He was, he claimed, just an old man who held the fantastic notion that beings from other planets were visiting Earth — he offered the books of Charles Fort as partial proof, and offered a pile of other, unpublished evidence as the remainder of the proof. He asked me to look upon him as a scientist who was conducting a laboratory experiment, asked me to search the Earth for proof. If I found such proof then his theory was proven.

He gave me a sum of money, which he said was all he could afford, and a postal address to which I was to make monthly reports. The reports in themselves were to be simple things, and so for thirty years I had been mailing one letter a month, a letter which contained but one word: "No." I had faithfully carried out his mission, because I saw behind his words, behind his carefully fabricated story about it being an old man's whim.

Brigham was a secret presidential agent.

I saw past Brigham as he talked. Behind him I saw a thoroughly alarmed president and a cabinet member, and a third party who was partly visible as a secret service agent. I saw that the money for my investigation had come from a private and confidential fund maintained by the president and accountable to no one but him. When I had looked into Brigham's mind and realized that all four of them took the interplanetary threat seriously, I began to believe. I accepted the job, I listened to the instructions, I took the money and left Brigham's house, and I've been reporting to someone ever since.

The president had died, long ago, back near the beginning of my thirty-year task. The cabinet member was shuffled somewhere into the discard and I had no idea where he might be

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now. I had not been back to see Brigham, and did not know if Brigham still personally directed the search or if he too had died and another was carrying on in his place. Brigham had still been there ten years ago when Marie came, when she married Arthur Jackson and settled down near the Manhattan Project. Brigham might still be there for all either of us knew.

Meanwhile I had grown up in the job, had come to believe in it completely, and was constantly on the alert for evidence that an alien walked the Earth, that someone or some thing from the nearer planets was among us, watching and waiting. Waiting for the birth of interplanetary travel, in all likelihood.

We sat there, Marie and I, comparing notes. It was curious the way her own progress was comparable to mine. She knew no more of Brigham and the people behind him than I did, had no other memories of him different than my own. She knew as much — or as little — about the entire picture as I knew, and could add no original touch of her own. Her job, she told me, had come to her in the exact manner as mine had.

Marie's warm and lovely body was touching mine, and with a detached corner of my mind I envied those years Arthur Jackson had lived with her. There was really no sane reason to envy the past, I told myself. Marie was mine, now. Jackson had wanted an equal as a mate, someone who matched his own intelligence. Until now, this moment, I had been certain I'd never find my mate — for where else on Earth lived another telepath? Suddenly I felt an outside warmth stealing over me, and realized for the first time how a mental blush might feel. I stared at the girl. The blush was sweeping into her cheeks.

"Sorry," I apologized. "I'll have to learn to keep such thoughts to myself."

She smiled but didn't answer. I dropped deeper into my mental state to spare her further embarrassment, and thought about her. From the corner of my eye I noted the bewitching breasts jutting up through her dress, the lean ripeness of her body and its more apparent compliment, the lovely face.

No wonder her husband was madly in love with her, no wonder he desired to possess that body, and no wonder he nearly went mad when that beautiful wife disappeared from him, "blanked-out" her loveliness.

Blanked-out!

I sat up, stunned. What a sucker I had been!

Marie Jackson, a Brigham agent — like hell! She knew no more about Brigham than I did, had no other memory of him than my own. Of course she didn't, she knew no more of him than she had read in my own mind. From the time I had dropped my barrier in that alley and let Brigham's name slip through she had been using my own thoughts to deceive me! Had even tried to make me forget the one startling, paramount difference between us: she could vanish as will! I could not.

I had been right the first time.

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Marie was an alien.

"Jehosophat!" I said suddenly, pulling away from her. "Your husband!"

"Where?" She jumped.

"Not here — I didn't mean that," I said hastily, "but I forgot to call him back. I'm supposed to report on you, and we certainly don't want him to come walking in here. I'll call now."

"Must you, *now?*" she asked softly with words, and sending along with them a suggestive undertone of thought.

"I don't want to, believe me. I want to stay right here with you until hell freezes over." I carefully hid the lie and forced myself to return an intimate thought. "The sooner we get him out of the way, the sooner you and I — " and I let the suggestion hang there.

She smiled lazily. I got out of the booth and signalled the waiter for another round of drinks. She said, "Please don't be too long."

"Count on me," I replied. I looked again at her striking features and once more envied Arthur Jackson in his ignorance.

She winked and I walked over to the telephone booths. As soon as I was out of her line of sight I closed off from her my flow of thought and got the devil out of there, out the back way and down the street as fast as my feet would carry me. People stared at me as I ran. Marie was deadly. I wanted to get as much distance between us as was possible.

I ran until I found an empty cab and jumped in. "Get moving fast!" I snapped at the driver. I gave him the address of Arthur Jackson's home, hoping the man had given up the street search for us and returned there.

Marie Jackson — the thing I had been set to catch, had very neatly caught me.

I wanted to warn Jackson first because his danger was immediate, and because I did owe him a certain loyalty . . . he was a human being. And when I reported to Brigham I would not tell him how I had been taken in, would not tell him she had pretended to be another searcher like myself, that she had hoodwinked me with a feigned fright and pretended fear of me. She had lied to me, tricked me with word and thought, cleverly followed my conversational line on my search with insertions of her own which sounded as if she, too, had known Brigham. I didn't want him to know I had fallen flat on my face.

By using some sort of tremendous mental power which an earthborn telepath — myself — did not have and could not guess at, she had vanished from sight. She was from the *outside,* from up there where humans hoped to be someday.

The cab pulled up in front of Arthur Jackson's house. The lighted windows in one of the rooms told me where he was.

I dashed across the lawn and stopped in mid-flight, astonished. That which came spilling across the wide yard with the light told me something

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else. Marie was ahead of me.

"You want to kill me!" came the mental image of his accusation.

"You are a fool," she snapped. "This job is ended."

I hastily circled the house, searching the windows, and found a set of screened kitchen-windows open to the night. I crawled up through one of them, and lowered myself to the kitchen floor without a sound, and started quietly through the darkness of the house toward the lighted room. My mind caught a sense of urgency from Marie. I paused, sought out ahead of me and found she was working on a metallic object. She was not expecting me yet.

Her husband was frightened, and confused as to her presence and her purposes, and in his ignorant fear he was babbling furiously without pausing to organize his words. I listened to them for only a second and turned my attention back to his wife. Marie was extremely busy on *something* and I could pick up only bits of her concentrated thought. She was hurriedly attempting to take a fix upon some object which had moved, or to arrange a fix upon it. The fragments of concentration were very vague.

I crept closer to the lighted doorway, moved along until Arthur Jackson came into view. He was seated in a chair, held there by invisible bonds, staring at her and talking. I listened to him again.

". . . kill me, you found out what you wanted to know and you're going to kill me, you found out about the project and you're going to radio your friends, you're a spy but don't think I haven't been wise to you because I have, and I hired a man to follow you, so if you kill me now . . ."

He went on and on but I had lost interest in what he was saying. He had said radio. Radio — the machine in the suitcase, which earlier that day I had glimpsed in his mind, the thing on which his wife was now working. Marie Jackson was setting up a fix to find a position which had moved, and her husband thought it was a radio.

I remembered his earlier words, his telling me that he discovered her reading a schematic. I knew then what she was doing, what she was working on. With that key to her vague mental pattern, I could assemble the spillage that came my way and see what she was doing.

He thought it was a radio, thought she was using it to relay information on the hydrogen bomb back to her countrymen in Europe. He was only partly right. Marie Jackson was setting up a fix on her home planet, a body which had moved in space since she last used the instrument. The machine was the only kind of a communicator which was capable of piercing the Heaviside Layer, a combination telepathic-electronic transmitter which broadcasted on a tight beam to a fixed position. It was a transmitter which employed an electrically stepped-up mental force to hurl a message across space to another planet.

She suddenly ceased working. I froze against the wall, waiting to see if she had discovered me but no thought from her indicated that. Instead she put out a feeler toward the

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street, splayed the mental search beam over a wide area seeking my presence. Satisfied that I had not yet approached the house, she dropped it.

The work on the transmitter was finished. Jackson was still babbling.

In a flaring instant of anger she silenced him, hurled a mental force which paralyzed his tongue, and the man fell dumb, choking. I carefully followed that, and noticed that she had also paralyzed his legs. That was why he had never left the chair since I had come into the house. Marie walked around a table nearer to him.

"Arthur," she said aloud, slowly, so that he would understand, "you're a fool! The man you hired to follow me is a fool!"

I remained motionless in the darkness, against the wall. I listened to her words with my ears, but my mind was reaching out to that instrument, examining it, studying the manner of its operation, looking for the inlet which received the mental thought and amplified it.

"I have little choice in the matter," she was saying. "If I allow you to continue your work on that unit you call a 'hydrogen bomb' I will be hastening the death of my own world. You do not know it but your military forces are as far advanced on space rockets as you are on this 'bomb' unit. Do you see what that means?

"Do you see what little choice I have? Arthur Jackson, we cannot allow your race to get off this planet for you are much too dangerous, too deadly! You are not yet fit to leave your planet for you would only spread your blackness to mine, to the other worlds. And so you must stay here until your race has conquered its own murderous habits.

"I am sorry, Arthur Jackson, but you must die, and any other man who follows in your place must die — until the time comes when your race can be trusted. The only other alternative is to eliminate this planet completely — to bring about an accident in your experimental laboratories, to cause this 'hydrogen bomb' weapon to turn upon its makers. Surely you do not want that, nor do we. But your work must be stopped, and to stop that it is necessary to stop you —"

She stopped then in mid-sentence and whirled in alarm. Behind her the transmitter had flared into life.

In two short seconds it was over and she was too late. I had found the input channel, found the way to activate the mechanism. It was that which had caused her alarm. As she whirled to stare at it, I stepped through the doorway.

Using her own words, coldly, without emotion, I thought into the transmitter: "The job is ended."

The lost two seconds were her undoing. Once before on that evening she had betrayed a fatal weakness, revealed her inability to make split-second decisions and act on them. Marie had spent too many years on Earth and had grown careless of her training. She made the second mistake I knew she would make.

She started for the machine instead of hurling a contradictory thought into it, instead of jamming the trans-

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mission of my message by forcing one of her own. I dived for the table where the transmitter lay.

She reached it first, bent over it, and I chopped my hand down on the back of her neck.

I swear to God I didn't know that would kill her.

It wouldn't have killed a human — there was not that much force behind it. I had forgotten — or perhaps the fact never so much as occurred to me — that she wasn't human.

Marie Jackson was dead, and in her death she was changed The mental image she had built around herself to walk Earth unnoticed was fading as fast as her mind died. The guise of a woman she had long ago assumed was slipping away and I did not like what was left. I stepped over the body, turned to her husband in the chair.

Arthur Jackson was dead, strangled to death on his own paralyzed tongue. I stood there a moment looking at him, wondering if he had lived long enough to see what his "wife" really looked like.

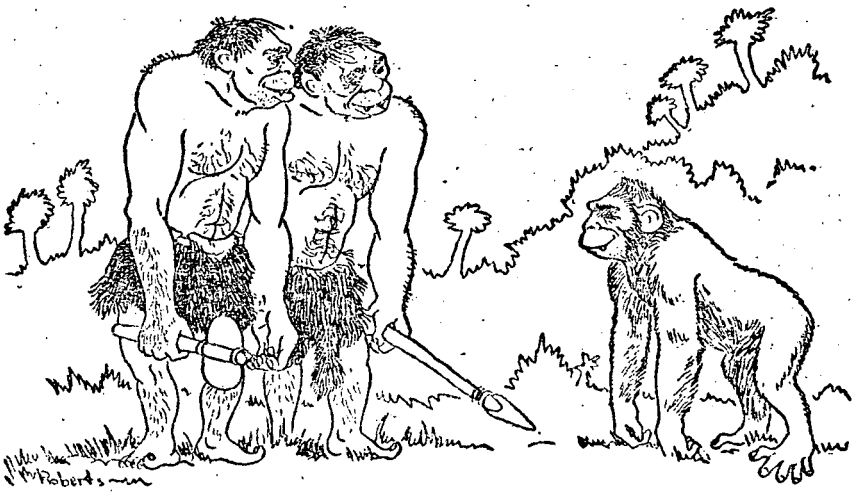
And then I walked out of the room, into the little entrance hall which contained a telephone. Standing there in the semi-darkness, I dialed the Western Union number.

"I want to send a night letter," I said to the clerk, and gave him Brigham's name and the post box number in Washington.

"And the message, sir?"

"Just say: the job is ended."

THE END



"Looks almost human, doesn't he?"

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PERSONALS

For sale: Fantasy Reader, No. 1-10; asf, June '44 to May '50; odd copies of AS, FA, FF, SS and others. Max E. Jones, 1106 Central Ave., Muncie, Ind. . . . Ted Forbes, HO-7496, would like to hear from a D. C. spinster or widow, 35-50, above average in intelligence. Ted's address is 1705 Lanier Place, Washington 9, D. C. . . . A new stf club starting in Bronx, N. Y. will meet in a branch of the N. Y. Public Library. For information write Alan H. Pesetsky, 1475 Townsend Ave., N. Y. 52, N. Y. . . . Asmodeus, a 35 page fanzine containing stories, poems and art work is now out, selling for 15c a copy. Available from Alan H. Pesetsky at the above address . . . Claude D. Plum, Jr., 526 Ellis St., San Francisco 9, Calif., is compiling a list of fantasy and stf movies, particularly silent and foreign films. He would like readers to furnish him with title, actors and general theme of any such films they have seen . . . Don Wilson, 495 N. 3rd St., Banning, Calif. wants good copies (with covers) of aSF for Jan. and Mar. '38, Jan. '40 and Aug. '43; the Unknown containing Hubbard's *Slaves of Sleep;* and Walt Gillings' Fantasy Review No. 2. Will sell aSF July '40, Feb. and June '39 and Jan. '44 (without covers); May '44 with cover half gone and July '44 with pages missing—25c each. . . . Ed Wood, 31 N. Aberdeen St., Chicago 7, Ill. wants copies of Fantasy Commentator Nos. 1-14; will sell or trade Amazings and Wonders '29-'35 . . . The Golden Gate Futurian Society is inviting all stf and fantasy fans in the bay area to attend their meetings and would like out-of-town visitors to get in touch with them. For details write Claude Plum, Jr., 526 Ellis Street or Agnes Rundll, 419 Frederick St., San Francisco . . . Ron Friedman, 1980 E. 8th St., Brooklyn 23, N. Y. would like subscriptions for his Science Fiction Daily. This is a daily postcard giving the latest developments in fandom. Costs 2c per copy, 10c a week . . . BEM, a new fanzine with fiction, poetry and features is available from John R. Kalas, 146 Ridgewood St. SE, Grand Rapids 8, Mich.; 10c, 3/25c . . . THE EXPLORER, contains letters, fiction, Trading Corner and Kollectors Korner to help you locate fans with hobbies of mutual interest; 10c, 50c/year. Send subscriptions to Ed Noble, Girard, Penna. . . . Walter Wood, 1940 N. Wood, Chicago, Ill. would like to trade pocket-book editions of The Green Girl, The Girl With The Hungry Eyes and Princess Of The Atom for aSF, June, July and Sept. issues . . . Stf fans in the Atlanta area interested in forming a fan club please get in touch with Henry Reinhardt, 74 14th St. N.E. (tel. No. AT-1157), Atlanta, Ga. . . . Albert K. Bender, 784 Broad St., Bridgeport, Conn. would like to correspond with anyone interested in science and astronomy . . . Elliott McDowell, Brookside Lodge, Mentone, Calif. would like to hear from fans with first-hand knowledge of Dianetics . . . Donald E. Gates, Box 405, Ancon, Panama Canal Zone is trying to locate a copy of My First 2,000 Years, by Geo. Sylvester Verick. He would also like to correspond with fem-fans, and with anyone interested in painting, sketching or constructing models of stf, weird or fantasy subjects . . . Joseph Tierney, 95-03 57th Ave., Elmhurst, New York would like to buy issues of aSF published prior to 1945 . . . Clyde T. Hanback, 1228 15th St., NW, Washington 6, D. C. would like fans to submit material for future issues of his fanzine Space Magazine . . . Send in your personals to this column or to our sister magazine IMAGINATION.

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MILLIONS IN IT

By H. A. HIGHSTONE

The telephone company is a tough customer to finagle for a free phone call — but MacTavish found out how to do it all the way from Mars!

MacTavish is the name of this particular character; he's owner-skipper of the CC-2964, one of those intermediate class freight-carriers left over from War VI. MacTavish shuttles the 2964 back and forth between New Chicago and Martian ports, carrying everything from nails to vitamins. He's always a little cheaper than anyone else, but always shows a neat pr-r-rofit. Low overhead is his secret. "Make it do, patch it up, wear it out," is the MacTavish credo. As a result, that ship is as dreadful a specimen among space-craft as ever hurt a man's eyes. Haywire isn't the word for it, as it's only by the grace of God and the ingenuity of Mister MacTavish that the ship didn't fall apart Out There long, long ago. Mister MacTavish is ingenious, believe me — he even has Phone subsidizing him, in a manner of speaking. Not willingly — they just can't help it. I nearly lost my job, trying to find out why.

You see, I'm in the Investigation Division of Phone, which means I'm a man-of-all-work who investigates irregularities in spacial radio transmissions. For instance, somebody squawks that he's billed for some interplanet or ship-to-planet calls he didn't make, or maybe there's an overcharge; I straighten things out. Sometimes a Central Operator will suspect something fishy, nothing specific, but just a hunch — that somebody's line is being tapped, or that bookmakers are using a loop — but whatever it may be, Investigation has to clear it up. Pretty routine stuff as a whole, except once in awhile when someone like Mister MacTavish gets into the picture.

As you probably know, all ships operating interplanetwise are required by law to make daily reports of their position in space, as of 1200 GMT, Earth Time. Obviously, Phone is the only outfit with transmitters powerful enough and receivers sensitive enough to do the job. It really costs, too, after you get out a good distance. For instance, halfway between here and Mars, Phone has to bank up all three of the big transmitters, plus use a hundred square miles of ultra-sensitive receiver net to pick up a little pip-squeak signal from some space ship. Comes to around fifty dollars for clearing just one report. Right there you have the origin of all

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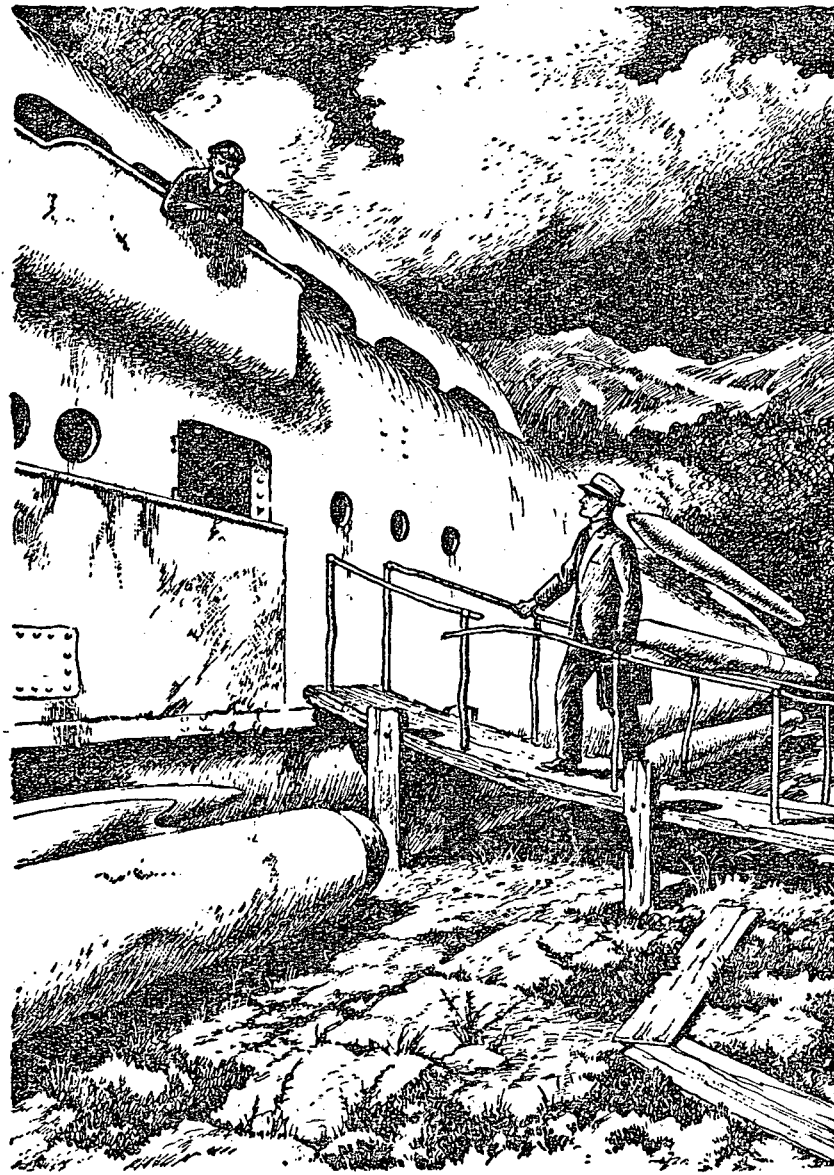

Illustration by Malcolm Smith

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MacTavish's trouble, because those tolls really bothered him plenty. I can just imagine him sitting up nights and gnawing his mustaches, stewing over that frightful expense which was taken right out of the net profits. It was as bad as a hole in a man's pocket, and no end to the drain, either. Oh for the whuskey 'twould have bought!

It was a routine report from the Billing Office which started the fireworks. Billing automatically turns in a report to Investigation every time a monthly statement shows an abnormal decrease. "Abnormal" was the word for this one, too. . . . Mac's bill was down about ninety-seven percent from the preceding month! The answer was made crystal clear, the instant I got a hold of his toll sheet — there wasn't a single position report charged against him. This was true in spite of the fact that he'd obviously been out to Mars and back. Anyway there were two charges for arrival notices, one to a North Martian port and another to New Chicago. Otherwise, the toll sheet was blank. It looked like an open-and-shut case for ICC — Interplanet Communications Commission — but I had to make out my own report — form 12A — before I did anything else.

An hour or so later, MacTavish was loading in New Chicago and I was sitting in his cabin watching him pour the refreshments as a preliminary. First he filled the glass about half-full, the bare minimum which escapes being miserly. Then paused, and I could see his mind working. I almost had to laugh in his face, his mental processes were so obvious.

"This stuff is horribly expensive," he was saying to himself, "There! That'll do! But bide a bit, now. This lad's an investigator, maybe a mickle more will put him in a friendlier spirit." After that tell-tale pause, he filled her up right to the brim.

"It's about your communications bill, Captain," I told him, after a decent interval. "It seems that during the past month we find no tolls for position reports on your abstract. I'm required to find out the reason. Communication trouble, perhaps?" MacTavish sucked at his mustache and gave me a foxy grandpa grin.

"Ye wouldna be one to put the cart on before the hor-r-se, now, lad, would ye?" he countered. "Unless I'm wrong, which I misdoubt, the ICC cares naught aboot tolls, only that positions be properly reported. That I have done, as ye can plainly see." With that, he handed me a file of newspaper clippings — a complete sequence of daily position reports for the voyage just ended, New Chicago to Mars and return.

"And should ye care to examine the log book," continued MacTavish, still grinning happily, "I'll be too glad to show that it verifies each of yon clippings absolutely." That is exactly what the log book did. Very, very peculiar. . . . I tried bending the old hard, long look on him, half out of the corners of the eyes — once in awhile this dodge startles a character into blurting out some clue — but he just stared me down, his mocking

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grin getting broader, if anything. Mister MacTavish was doing something with mirrors here, no doubt about it, but he was miles out in front of me.

"Well," said I at last, "perhaps I did get the cart and the horse mixed a bit. You've been reporting your positions, obviously, but the only possible way anybody knows of doing it is through the channels of Phone. Evidently, you're using some other method. Would you mind explaining?"

"Na, na!" replied MacTavish owlishly, wagging a stubby finger at me. "In a monner of speaking, 'tis an invention. And naught of anything illegal aboot it, either; mind that! Tis just a thr-r-rifty idea which occurred to me one day whilst conning over expenses. Were it patentable, which unfortunately 'tis not, 'twould be worth millions, lad, millions!"

"A wee drop more, just for kindness." MacTavish reached for my glass. This time I couldn't keep my face straight; he stopped pouring dead on the halfway mark.

That smile of mine didn't wear very long. I was on the spot and this unhappy fact was facing me from the moment I began filling out form 12A. Those boys over in Audit are devilishly touchy about tolls, so I couldn't merely pass on the word that Mac's bill was down ninety-seven percent because he was getting positions in without paying for them, and that Investigation had no explanation to offer. After all, my job is to find out answers to tricky little problems like this.

There was a long chance — it was the only possibility which came to mind, anyway — that Mac might be conniving with Central operators. You know, giving them side money to forget to abstract his tolls? Possible, but highly improbable. Just the same, and because there wasn't anything else to do, I plugged in a pair of head telephones on #7 Earth-Mars circuit the next time Mac took off. I started listening shortly after 1200 GMT, just to see if any fish — even a small one — might come to my hook.

My first try paid off with exactly nothing. I sat there for a long time, listening to perhaps half a dozen conversations and maybe ten position reports, but any business from CC-2964 was conspicuously absent. Next day, however, there was Mac's position report in all the newspapers, plain as daylight. 300,000 miles out of New Chicago for Mars, on Authorized Route Number Five.

Like a flash, I had ICC on the line. How-and-when-was-that-position-reported-to-them-please? After a lot of the typical stalling and double-talk you get from government agencies, they said cautiously that the report had been telephoned to them. Yes, it was unusual. Yes, customarily ship position reports came in as prepaid messages on the video screen from Phone Central.

"Customarily?" I yelled in astonishment. "How many others have been telephoned in? How long has this been going on, anyway?"

Bear in mind, Phone has millions

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in equipment and millions in know-how invested in these spacial radio transmissions. On the ships themselves, the radio gear is relatively low-powered, but only because Phone makes up for the deficiency at this end. Then, all of a sudden, characters start phoning reports via *land* wires. Local calls; deposit-ten-cents-please . . . .

However, ICC wasn't giving out any more information. They shut up like clams, mumbling about Secrecy Provisions of The Act. They shunted me to some office sea-lawyer when I got to really clamoring about it, and this party let me know, tartly, that folks could send in position reports by carrier pigeon, if it suited them, and they arrived in time. The Communications Act didn't specify methods; it specified procedures only. Furthermore, they were no information bureau; Article XIV, Section 11-C, subparagraph 37 specifically prohibited them from giving out certain facts — like those I was trying to get. Furthermore, I'd laid myself open to dire penalties for even *trying* to get any news. Furthermore . . . . I hung up on him and sat there for a long time staring at the wall.

The thing had me up against the ropes. The stenographers, clattering and giggling, went out to lunch and came back, and still not one single intelligent lead came to mind. All I could snag were weird ideas about thought transference, or pacing the ship to some pre-arranged schedule, or even some super-super telescope for reading blinker signals from Mac's tail. . . . After awhile I gave it up and went out for a sandwich, my tail dragging.

"Blinker signals," I mumbled, when the girl asked for my order. "I *beg* your pardon?" she came back, you know the tone of voice. This job of mine calls for lots of aspirin sometimes.

On my second try, I extended my listening period. ICC had dropped one little splinter of usable information — the time that phone call had come in was just after I'd closed up shop on #7 circuit. Well around 1615 GMT, this second time, I got a bingo, kind of a bingo anyway, because in came CC-2964 beeping for Central. When he got her, however, it was no position report, just a person-to-person call from Mister MacTavish to some Thomas Barr MacLeod, New Chicago 39-4882.

"One moment, please," trilled Central. There was a short wait while she rang the number on the wire circuit. I could hear only her end of the conversation, but it appeared that MacLeod wasn't there. She passed the news on to Mac.

"Will you speak to anyone else at that number?" she asked — that's Operations Form Question #11 — "or do you wish me to try to reach your party later?"

"Never mind," replied Mac, his voice weak and blurred under the static. The thought crossed my mind that he probably had his transmitter running on low power to save electricity. I'm serious, you don't know this guy . . .

"Never mind," replied Mac, "I

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may try myself a bit later on. Good day or good night to ye, as the case may be. 2964 over and out."

Well, I waited a bit and then a bit more. I waited three blessed hours, but Mac never came back. Just the same, his position report was in the papers next day, bold as brass. Furthermore, a little bird reported to me that Mac's position had been phoned in, land wire, to ICC during the time I'd been listening! Yeah, I said a little bird; it's illegal to put recorder taps on anyone's line, you know that as well as I.

I didn't try to make any sense out of it. I put on my hat, I went down in the elevator, and around the corner to the Three Bells, where I said to McCarthy:

"Gimme a double-barrelled, and stand by with reinforcements." McCarthy is one of these worriers, he takes customers seriously.

"How come you order a double-barrelled? You got troubles?" he asked.

"Troubles?" I repeated. "Naw, I eat up trouble. What I got, they ain't even invented a word for!"

I'm not too intelligent perhaps, as I didn't catch on until my third try. Mac came in around 1550 GMT, calling James Pelton MacLeod, New Chicago 39-4882, person-to-person. Same routine. . . . No, he wouldn't speak to anyone else at that number but maybe he'd try later on. End of transmission.

The circuit went into Clear position, and there was nothing in my headphones except the rasping and clattering of static. A little more of this treatment and people would be speaking in hushed voices about the poor lug who jumped out of a window over at the Investigation Division. So young, too. . . . Then, all of a sudden, *click!* An enormous, dazzling light abruptly illuminated the scene — a wonderful, glorious, warming light. All the cares and troubles which beset the day disappeared like smoke sucked into a fan.

"Jackpot!" I screamed in exultation, leaping out of my chair and pounding the desk. "Jackpot!" One of the nearest stenographers gave sort of a squawk and keeled over . . . out like a light. I don't understand women at all. . . . I went out of the office so fast that the phone cord snapped off at the plug — I still had the headphones on.

"Naught illegal aboot it, eh?" I was chattering, as I legged it down the corridor. . . . People turned and gawked at me. . . . "We'll see aboot that!" Those person-to-person calls of Mac's were phoneys. He was using a name code, different names on each call, and he had it rigged so that first name indicated his position in millions of miles, while the second name gave the hundreds of thousands. ICC doesn't require exact figures, as all they want is the position to the nearest hundred thousand miles. Moreover, and here's the important point, if you don't get the party you ask for on a P-T-P call, there's no charge!

Mac was in the bag, and all I had to do was pull the draw-string. For instance — at 20,400,000 miles, he put

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in a call for Alvin Pierce MacLeod. In his code, Alvin stood for twenty, Pierce stood for four. This stooge of his at New Chicago 39-4882 merely said Alvin wasn't there and then phoned the position in to ICC. Charge: ten cents for one local call; net saving to MacTavish, $32.48, tax not included.

I took the stairs two at a time, six flights down to Legal on the 27th floor. Elevators are too slow when a man is really in a hurry.

"Oh yes, you have him properly over a barrel," the boys in Legal assured me, after they had calmed me down enough to talk coherently. "No law against making person-to-person calls, even to non-existent individuals. However, when the intent to defraud is present, that's different. Several precedents. . . . " They were all talking at once like those guys do when they get warmed up to something.

". . . yes, sure, remember distinctly. People vs. Greenfellow, Bankhead, et. al. . . . Yeah, yeah, Judge Borkman — I remember reading the transcript. . . . Eighth District Federal court. . . . Sure, and Third Appelate used such strong language in refusing to reverse, they never tried to carry it any higher. What's this guy's name again? MacTavish? He's as good as in pokey right now. Want us to take over?"

"As of the present moment!" I told them heartily. "One thing, though, I want to serve the summons personally on that grinning Scotch ape. I gotta get something out of it, considering all the headaches he gave me." They said they'd arrange it that way, but what was I wearing those head telephones for anyhow?

Now listen carefully, *never take anything for granted!* Not anything! Never! I still get butterflies in the breadbasket when I recall how close I came to sticking my neck out into the wild blue yonder on that particular occasion, and getting it rapped heartily with a Scotch shillaleigh, if there is such an article. Phone, to put it mildly, is always annoyed when employees dope off and get the company involved in damage suits.

Be that as it may, I felt much like a cat dropping comfortably into a barrel after a mouse when I walked in on Mac the second time, a summons in my pocket. I nearly didn't make it, incidentally. The rail on the ship-ladder between C and D decks was still loose and it nearly threw me down the dynamo hatch, just as it had the first time I came aboard. That's the 2964 all over, just a roving fugitive from the junk yard. It's a miracle that Mac ever keeps a crew, and an even greater one he doesn't fall apart in space twenty times a voyage.

Mister MacTavish still wore his foxy grandpa grin, and he hesitated again at the halfway mark, then filled it up — groaning inwardly, no doubt, at the frightful expense.

"To be brief, Captain," I said, "I've come back to discuss this monkey business of Jonathan-one-million, Andrew-two-million, Walter-three-hundred-thousand." He looked me

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straight in the eye.

"I never was one to grosp riddles quickly, even as a laddie," he came back, looking quite blank. "Speak on a bit."

"It's no use, Captain," I told him, "We have a log of all those phoney person-to-person calls you made last voyage, and quite naturally, we've deciphered that name code you used." I handed him a carbon copy of all my data. There wasn't much to it, but it told a devastating story even a half-wit might understand. Mac pretended to look at over carefully, even taking time out to polish his glasses, halfway through. The grin was still there, even after he'd finished.

"Ay, Ay," he agreed, nodding his head. "That's all correct and in order. I put in the calls, true enough. A great waste of time it was, too. I never did manage to connect with that nephew of mine."

"Nephew!" I yelled, boiling over at such brazen gall. "Nephews, you mean, and what a shoal of them you must have, Captain MacTavish! Nephews by the dozens! All living at the same address! No, no! It was a good idea, but it *is* illegal, I'm sorry." I reached for the summons.

"Tosh, tosh, now. Wait up a bit, lad," grinned the old knave. "Let me show ye a wee clipping from a news-pa[illegible]re 'tis," he went on, after [illegible] fumble in his desk. [illegible] that clipping through [illegible]n I was done, my ears [illegible] a red, red rose. . . . [illegible]how hot your ears can [illegible]e caught with your neck stuck out.

Mac was as far on the right side of the law as a kind old lady handing out Christmas boxes to needy families. He didn't have any shoals of nephews, he had only one, but what a nephew! Check, if you don't believe it, but that nephew's name is Andrew Thomas Robert Martin Frederick, plus-ninety-five-other-given-names, Macleod! A year or so previous, he'd added ninety-seven names to the one he'd been using. The newspapers pick up a screwball incident like that every time.

Mister MacTavish was as law-proof as they come. When you prosecute for fraud, you must prove your case, according to the rules of evidence. Legally speaking, Phone didn't have any. The nephew existed, so if Mac chose to call him person-to-person by whatever of the given names struck his fancy — that's his privilege. If the nephew never happened to be around — so what? Not one chance in a hundred of hooking him. Had I served that summons, Phone would have been wide open for a countersuit — defamation of character, mental anguish, slander, and other items. And a certain investigator would have been "severed" from the payroll, as the front office quaintly phrases it. I have a warm spot in my heart for Mac for that. No meanness in him. I had my neck stuck out as far as mortal man can stick it, and he gave me a chance to pull it back. Long may his patches hold. . . .

"Ye look a bit peaked aboot the gills, lad," observed Mac, in tones of

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false anxiety. "Here! Let me give ye a spot more. Perhaps 'twill chirk ye up."

"No thanks," I told him, finding my voice. "I'll take the thought for the deed. Good day, Mister MacTavish."

"Mind the fifth step on the ladder betwixt B and C decks!" he called after me. "'Tis a bit on the loose side, but ye'll do fine if ye just tread carefully on it!"

"Thanks again," I mumbled. I got down to A deck without breaking any arms or legs and was skulking for the hull hatch when he peered down at me from the head of the companionway. He'd followed me, the old ape.

"I told ye true, lad, now, didn't I?" he called out in mock earnest, his bifocals glittering in the electric lights, "naught of anything illegal anywhere, and millions in it, were it patentable, millions!"

BOOK REVIEWS

By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

FIFTEEN years ago Stanley Grauman Weinbaum died. Four years after his death I went to New York to attend the First World Science Fiction Convention, and while there visited my friend Julius Schwartz, who had been Weinbaum's agent. It was at that time that Julie showed me the unpublish[ed] manuscript of the novel then known as "The Mad Brain" and now published* as THE DARK OTHER. Campbell had wanted it for *Unknown* but found it "too sexy"; anything that was too sexy for Campbell suited Erisman just fine, so "Mad Brain" was on the line for publication in *Marvel Science Stories* but for some reason unknown[t] or forgotten by me never appeared there.

In 1947, Weinbaum's widow put the script into my hands, and I announced to the publishing world that bids would be accepted. On April 19, 1948, I signed a contract with the Fantasy Publishing Co. A portion of that contract is interesting to reveal: *It is understood that the advertising campaign shall not be conducted in a sensationalistic manner, such as "the last of the Weinbaum manuscripts . . . his greatest work brought to light . . . etc.," but that it shall be presented as a novella colored by his great s-f enthusiasm, written during a developing stage of his career and put into print to satisfy his fans.*

With Margaret's blessing I edited the script, removing some of the anachronisms of the 20's when it was written, and on July 1, 1950 it was published.

THE DARK OTHER is a portrait of a modern Jekyl-Hyde, a Dorian Gray, a man divided. There are 32 tantalizingly titled chapters, such as "A Question of Science," "A Fantasy of Fear," "Letter from Lucifer," "Descent into Avernus," "The Demon Lover," "Scopolamine for Satan" and "The Demon Free," each fulfilling its promise of diabolic developments. Nicholas Devine, the protagonist, is a tortured genius, twisted by a cerebral abnormality that even a dose of dianetics couldn't cure. Playing agonist to the protagonist is pert Pat Lane, who is almost driven insane by a series of agonizing experiences.

This is a pretty hair-raising story, not to mention eyebrow-raising, and one that most Weinbaum fans will probably want on their shelves along with "The New Adam," "Martian Odyssey" and "Black Flame." For Lovecraft completists it will be required because of its reference to the Necronomicon.

The jacket is by OW artist Jon Arfstrom. The jacket blurb, incidentally, is inspired. Anonymously authored, understand, by the publisher's wife, Peggy Crawford, it contains one line as fine as anything in the book, quote: "In the depths of the night dormant superstitions (man's unruly legacy from pre-scientific ages) become appalling realities and old forgotten tales arise from their graves to gambol in a ghostly pa[ge] across the mind." The text includes a[n] tiful short poem by Weinbaum, of [life] and death, which might be titl[ed] Far Country's Silent Ways."

*FPCI, Los Angeles; 256 pgs., $3.

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

THE 3rd Annual WESTERCON went off in L.A. with a bang. Despite a transit strike, 138 fans and pro's turned up from all over Cal. for the 13-hour affair. Bradbury read one of his new unpublished stf stories to the crowd, van Vogt gave a speech, Ackerman spoke on the forthcoming developments on the fantasy book, magazine and film fronts, and Dr. Richardson, with the aid of Bonestell slides, took the audience on a tour of the solar system. Advance illustrations from OTHER WORLDS were auctioned, along with originals by Bonestell, Cartier, Finlay and Leydenfrost, and 3 inscribed mss. published in OW were avidly bid for: Bradbury's *Way in the Middle of the Air,* van Vogt's *Automaton,* and Evans' *Little Miss Ignorance.*

An s.f. author has written a best seller. It's L. Ron Hubbard, whose DIANETICS. the new Science of Mind, is causing a commotion all over the country. It's a startling approach to the creation of *homo superiors,* here and now, out of the common stock of ordinary man. Other unusual Books of the Month (fictional) about the brain are the late Stanley Weinbaum's THE DARK OTHER and A MAN DIVIDED by Dr. Olaf Stapleton of "Odd John" fame.

GALAXY is the name of the science fiction magazine soon to début under the editorship of H. L. Gold, remembered for his collaboration in UNKNOWN with de Camp, *None But Lucifer.* MARVEL SCIENCE, a short-lived title of 10 years ago, is being revived, and THRILLS, INC., the first Australian science fiction mag., is now being published.

The next men on the moon (filmatically speaking) may be—Abbott & Costello! The Hollywood producer responsible for bringing Philip Wylie's *Gladiator* to the screen has called in Forrest J. Ackerman and Chas. Beaumont for consultation about possible plots. Flushed with success at the public reception of their ROCKETSHIP "X-M," Lippert Productions are considering a sequel by Weaver Wright, EXPEDITION VENUS.

Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong, and so fantasy is booming in France at the present time. Likely to be translated and put in book form before long are such favorites as "The Green Man of Graypec," "The World of Null-A," "The Skylark of Space," "Space Cadet" and "The 4-Sided Triangle."

The First European Science Fiction Convention is being planned for Summer of '51. Better start learning Esperanto *now!*

RAY BRADBURY has sold "Mars is Heaven!" *ten times* in the last six months . . . ANTHONY BOUCHER will be this year's Guest of Honor at the World Science Fiction Convention in Portland, Oregon . . . HENRY KUTTNER has gone back to school; KRIS NEVILLE is a student at Kuttner's rival varsity . . . BOB OLSEN is hitting the comeback trail . . . NELS BOND will have his "Lancelot Biggs: Spaceman" released by Doubleday on Aug. 3 . . . CATHERINE MOORE, DR. KELLER and WM. TEMPLE have just had the dubious honor of being "pirated" south of the border, stories by them being swiped and presented in a Spanish science fiction magazine . . . Another curious compliment was paid our contributor, FORRY ACKERMAN, when his story, *Atomic Error,* published in our July issue, was plagiarized by a college student who memorized it and turned it in to English professor Sam Sackett, an *Other Worlds'* reader, who recognized it but nevertheless gave it an "A"!

When the Columbia scientifilm THE BIG EYE is released in Sept., a pocketbook edition of the novel will be made simultaneously available. Also scheduled for pocketbooking are Ed Hamilton's *Star Kings,* Stan Coblentz's "Caverns Below." and "What Mad Universe?" by Fred Brown.

Authors, editors and fans with news of general scientifictional interest should drop their information to: Walter Chinwell, c/o Box 6151 Metro Stn., Los Angeles 55, Cal.

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RESCUE BEACON

By CRAIG BROWNING

Time travel could be mighty dangerous if you were left stranded ages ago. How could you arrange to be rescued?

RAMONE reached out toward the dashboard with one hand, his fingers searching blindly for the time-field stud. His wristwatch, which was regulated by the master chronometer on the control bank showed absolute time rather than stasis time as it existed in the ship. There were just ten minutes more before he must start back home.

"Mmmmm," Mishi purred, snuggling up closer in Ramone's arms.

Ramone's fingers contacted what he thought was the right stud and pushed on it gently. From somewhere a bone-jarring grind started up. With a muttered curse Ramone jerked free to see what he had done.

The dashboard twisted grotesquely under the light-distortion produced by the interaction of conflicting fields. Ramone saw that he had pushed in the hyperdrive stud instead of the stasis-stud—and had done so with space-drive working!

The first rule of hyper-space travel was to cut out the space-drive before switching in hyperdrive, or the tremendous inertial drag of the space-drive would overload the hyperdrive and burn it out.

"Damn!" he muttered. "I wish this heap had an interlock to prevent that."

"What happened?" Mishi said dreamily into his ear, her arms circling about his neck possessively. He pushed her away.

"I just burned out the hyperdrive, that's what happened," Ramone said grimly. "And we're *only* five light years away from the nearest service station where we could get a new one. We'd have to limp back at less than light speed."

"What!" Mishi exclaimed, sitting up. "Why you stupid idiot! How am I going to get to work on time in the morning? I'll lose my job! That's what I get for going out with a bookkeeper who can't afford a decent ship."

"That kind of talk's not going to get you anywhere," Ramone said rudely. "We're in a spot. We've got to land somewhere and figure out something. Remember, I've got a job to think of too."

"Remind me to give you a blunt *no* the next time you ask me to go riding with you," Mishi said, taking out her compact and mending her makeup.

"Remind me not to ask you," Ramone said dryly.

He flicked the switch that lighted the radar telescope screen. Just at the edge of the screen was a smooth curve

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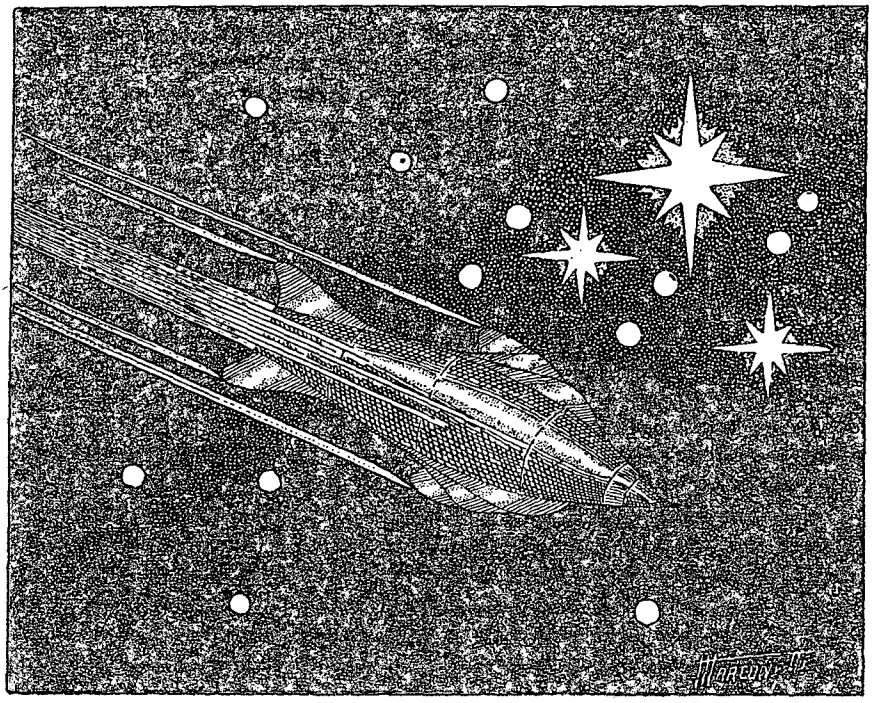

Illustration by Walter Marconette

of some nearby globe. He adjusted the controls until the object filled the screen.

"A planet just ahead," Ramone muttered. "We'll land there and see what gives. It seems to have land masses and oceans, so maybe there's life of a low order."

He switched in the autopilot and brought its objective co-ordinate to rest on the thickest part of one of the larger land masses, then pressed the stud that started the autonavigator to calculating thrusts and trajectories.

That done, he turned to face Mishi.

"Better be nice to me," he said, grinning. "We just might have to grow old together, though I don't relish the prospect after what you've been saying."

"Oh, Ramone," Mishi purred. "You know I didn't mean a word of it." She put her arms around his unyielding neck again and murmured into his ear, "I was just upset."

"Well, stay upset until we land," Ramone said, "I've got to shove us

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out of stasis or we'll find ourselves stuck under the planet's surface without enough power to pull free."

Mishi bit her lip and settled back.

There were green things growing in lush profusion. From above Ramone had seen that they were landing in the center of a verdant plain that stretched from horizon to horizon. Here and there were square patterns that indicated a semi-intelligent race with at least the rudiments of the knowledge of surveying and the necessary implications of property rights.

When Ramone had landed the ship, just to be on the safe side, he burned off everything within a radius of a quarter of a mile of the spot where the ship rested. Now, if any vicious vermin infected this strange planet, it would be easy to see them running toward the ship, and burn them out of existence with a short blast of atomic fire.

"It's a wonder the thing worked," Mishi said cattily.

"I thought you liked my ship," Ramone taunted.

"It has nice upholstery," Mishi said. "That's the only new thing in it."

"Well, it has a guarantee," Ramone said. He frowned at the thought this brought up. "That guarantee won't cover the burning out of the hyper-drive, though. That was my own fault. It'll take a month's pay to replace it."

"With a rebuilt one, of course," Mishi taunted.

"Sure," Ramone shrugged. "I'm in the same class you are, the working class."

Whatever her reply, he didn't hear it. He was watching the approach of several creatures across the still smoking scorched earth.

They were definitely human, but in a ludicrously distorted way. They were small, barely a third as large as the humans Ramone knew. Their legs were short almost to the point of being stubby, and their foreheads sloped back slightly from the eyebrows, showing so little space for a brain that it would be a miracle they had one.

Their clothing was voluminous to the point of absurdity, mostly ornamental rather than functional, and noticeably hindered their walking. In fact, their mode of walking was designed to protect and preserve the ornamental attributes of their dress.

Mishi burst out laughing.

"Have a good laugh now," Ramone said, "because when we step out to meet these people we've got to treat them with respect."

"But they're funny!" Mishi said.

"So what," Ramone said. "A thousand of them pitted against us wouldn't be a laughing matter. We've got to stick to the advice the travel bureau has in its guidebook."

"You're right," Mishi said, suddenly sensible. "It's a rather bizarre experience to land right in the midst of what is probably a half-civilized, totally unscientific race."

The small humans were within a hundred yards of the ship now, and by their manner they were trying

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to indicate friendliness. One, who seemed to be their leader, was still advancing, while the others held back in a compact group. None of them seemed to have any sort of weapon.

"I'll slip into my spacesuit," Ramone said. "We're going to have to work fast or we'll be stuck here for a long time."

The spacesuit was made entirely of transparent plastic. When it was on him, its surface contours gleamed with reflected and refracted light in such a way that it seemed to be a field of eerie light surrounding him. Its coated surface was too perfect to be seen directly.

Mishi watched as he emerged from the ship to confront the natives. He towered over them so that three of them, standing head on head, would have just equaled him in height.

His appearance had an electric effect on them. They dropped to the ground, hiding their faces from him. Mishi's mind catalogued this act as evidence of superstition. The natives would believe them to be supernatural visitors. The guidebook said this usually indicated that it would be a simple matter to dominate the native population. That was something that would be very necessary if they were to ever get back home before they died of old age.

Mishi watched with an approving light in her eyes at the way Ramone dealt with the situation. He had picked up the groveling leader and set him on his feet, and squatted down so that he could talk with him.

The language would probably be unintelligible and very high pitched; but it would be easy to establish telepathic contact, and probably create the conviction in the natives' minds that they were hearing their own language.

From the way the native leader was nodding his head and moving his lips and maneuvering his hands it was apparent that he understood.

Mishi's red lips curled into an amused smile. The simple creatures were really to be pitied. They undoubtedly believed they were meeting some overlord of the universe, and they would be very surprised if they could realize that Ramone was only an underpaid clerk! Her subconscious thinking placed herself outside his category. She was merely a secretary, but she was beautiful, and had a beautiful body, as well as sultry eyes and pouting lips.

When Ramone re-entered the ship he flashed Mishi a quick, encouraging smile, and went over to the dashboard.

"What now?" she asked lazily.

"Why don't you get some sleep?" Ramone suggested. "I'm going to be pretty busy for the next few hours. First, I have to extend a stasis field out a few hundred miles. It has to be almost full stasis, because it's going to take several years to do what's necessary if we are to be rescued, and that few years must be condensed into a few non-static hours. I've got to extend it as far as those stone hills I saw when we were coming down. Also, I've got to do some fast figuring. Funny looking little people,

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aren't they? Jerky movements and pipsqueak voices. They think I'm the Creator of the universe!"

"I should let them see me," Mishi smiled. "They'd think I'm the Mother of Creation, but somehow, they are so little and have such small brains that it doesn't really matter to me what they think."

"Maybe not," Ramone said, "but we're going to have to put a hundred thousand of them to work for their whole lifetime, so we'd better place their feelings at the top of the list in importance."

Mishi yawned.

"If you don't mind, Ramone," she said, "I think I'll go into one of the sleeping locks and put it on nonstasis, so that the few years it takes you will go by in the few hours I nap."

Ramone hesitated for the barest instant, then shrugged his shoulders.

"Go ahead," he agreed indifferently, turning away from her.

"Oh don't be that way," Mishi said, irritated. "How do you expect me to feel? Here I go out for an evening's ride in the sky with a new boyfriend who's proud of his new second hand space job, only to have him strip the hyperdrive while we're light years from home. If I don't lose my job, I'll at least have a couple of days lopped off my vacation time."

"How do I expect you to feel?" Ramone echoed. "That is assuming that I care. Perhaps I did, but not any more. Frankly, I'm glad I stripped the hyperdrive. If I hadn't, I might never have seen you as you really are until I married you."

"Married me!" Mishi grabbed at the words. "The utter conceit of the man! When I marry, it will be to a man who has the ability to go out in the world and conquer it. It won't be a pantywaist who has to take a clerk's job and save his pennies until he can buy a *real* man's cast off pleasure ship, antiquated at that. I'll bet the used ship depot gave you a special buy on it, because no one else would take it at any price."

Ramone flushed a deep red, angry because she had hit the bullseye. He had gotten a very special buy, and it was one that they had wanted to get rid of. The reason was that new regulating laws were coming in which would require all ships being sold by used ship dealers to have the latest safet, devices. Privately owned ships wouldn't come under that regulation.

But the ship itself was a honey. It had only one owner, and he had left it in the hangar more than he had used it. Its power units were only one tenth of a per cent exhausted. It would take plenty of power to throw out the type of stasis field—antistasis, to be exact—that would be required.

Mishi was glaring at him contemptuously.

"Oh shut up and go to bed," Ramone said.

"You—you—!" Mishi took three quick steps toward him. Her hand flashed out and slapped Ramone, leaving a red imprint of her fingers.

For a long second he stared at her, a hurt look in his eyes. Then, abruptly, the hurt look was replaced by an assured amusement, and a strange

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confidence came over him.

He reached out and took her right wrist, twisting it sharply, forcing her to turn to avoid pain as he bent it. He applied pressure on it until she was half bent over. Then he pushed her over to a seat.

He sat down and pulled her arm until she lay across his lap.

"You asked for it, baby," he murmured happily as he brought the flat of his hand down in a succession of stinging slaps, whose sound almost equaled Mishi's cries of outraged protest at the indignity.

Her angry shouting changed to pleading by the dozenth blow, and to undisguised bawling by the two dozenth, and to a mixture of weeping and coaxing by the thirtieth. At the twentieth sharp slap on the target he had released her doubled up arm so she could use both hands to rub her eyes. When he stopped spanking her, she continued to lie there, weeping miserably.

With a satisfied grin on his face, Ramone turned away and bent over the controls. Behind him, Mishi got swiftly and silently to her feet. With all the strength she could muster, she placed a deftly-aimed kick where she thought it would do most good and stalked off for her nap.

The guide book gave directions for almost everything. It said that on anti-stasis, where everything within the field was speeded up, drouth would result. The normal flow of a river for twenty-four hours would stretch for the years that equaled that twenty-four hours. The same went for rainfall.

The guide book said that in building any call for help, the sense of irresponsibility of native creatures of semi-intelligence must be taken into account. The structure must be given some special meaning to them. Its parts must be large enough so they couldn't tear it down or cart off its parts. It must tie in with their future closely so that it would become a mystery down through their history but become known all over elsewhere, so that any chance visitor would immediately find out about it and recognize it for what it was.

The guide book gave the equations for prophecying the life curves of any semi-savage civilization that was governed by chance. Such races kept inadequate records, and didn't comprehend the nature of the forces affecting their mass thought. They didn't even suspect that much of thought arises from the action of longwave radiation on the cells of the cortex. Such radiation bathes a planet according to cycles, and is shot down by reflection and re-radiation from nearby stellar cold bodies such as moons and sister planets in a solar system. The result—rise to waves of fevered, warlike impulses, to mass migrations, to intellectualism in the masses, to race interbreeding, to a large number of upsurging trends in the historical trends of the total race. Similar radiations in localized spots give rise to many of the characteristics of the peoples dwelling there, so that even peoples of all types and from all places, when gathered into a new place, soon exhibit a predictable na-

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tional unity of spirit and tendency.

Ramone spent long hours studying all this in the guide book, and further long hours at the telescope, using the automatic navigator. The latter was used to isolate and study the various bodies in the system of moons and planets around the sun of the planet he had landed on. Finally he had a complete picture of all the forces controlling the race of quick darting, small people that had developed on this world. Further, by applying pure mathematics, he arrived at a comprehensive grasp of the current state of all the little people everywhere on the globe.

He finished his study as the first rays of the sun of this world rose above the horizon. Tired but satisfied, he stood up and went to the radar screen to see what was going on outside. There were more of the little people.

It was time to start things. He went back to the dashboard and started the stasis field, building it up until it extended hundreds of miles. Its outer reaches would fade gradually enough so that any living thing entering or leaving the area of the field wouldn't notice much change.

There would be many things that would create legends of strange doings, however. A person from some village outside the stasis field might enter the field for a long visit—and return to his native village to find that he'd been gone only a few hours. Someone from inside the field might leave its area for a day or two and return to the place he had left and find he had been gone for years.

Inside the stasis field the sun would take years to rise high in the heavens, and years in its slow fall to the opposite horizon. During those years the signal pile would be built. Hundreds of thousands of the little people would work long hours at the task of building it, starting now as young men, and growing old before its completion.

Ramone went back to the viewscreen and studied the strange little people. Their life span would be quite short in all probability. Most of their beliefs would center around personified natural mysteries and the fulfillment of desires, some of which he could satisfy directly, while others he would just have to promise fulfillment. It wouldn't do any harm, because it would give them something greater than themselves to look up to.

But Ramone knew he was dealing with much more than the mere handful of humanity in this small area of the globe. He was dealing with them —and their descendents for thousands of years to come. The massive beacon that would signal his presence to any ship that landed on this globe, and would tell its occupants that there was a stranded ship here that needed repairs, would have its effect on those descendants of this race of small people.

The very mystery of its existence would intrigue them, generation after generation. Their students would come to ponder over it, to wonder how their ancestors could have constructed it, to be amazed over the astronomical knowledge incorporated into its construction. This was the infallible

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knowledge of prophecy that enabled its designers to know what would happen a thousand years in the future, two thousand, and even three thousand years, etching that future history in imperishable stone.

He would have to work with them wearing his spacesuit in order to maintain proper atmospheric pressure. Since his muscles were accustomed to several times the gravity of this world, he would be a giant, radiant god, carrying the massive blocks of stone from the quarries to the base of the beacon. There thousands of skilled stonemasons would plane them down to the last fraction of an inch to fit them into their proper place in the edifice.

Ramone slipped into his spacesuit and left the ship to begin his work.

The huge ship appeared suddenly in the sky far above. It was there for a moment, then faded from view, only to re-appear in the same spot a moment later and remain in view. It sank slowly toward the giant pyramidal structure rising from the baked, flat terrain, and the ship resting on the ground a hundred yards from it.

The man sitting at the dashboard studied the large area of fertile ground, stretching almost from horizon to horizon, and frowned darkly, shaking his head.

He set his ship down near the one already there, put on his spacesuit, and left the ship. As his feet touched the atom-sterilized soil, another figure appeared from the other ship, hurrying forward to meet him.

Ramone hurried forward, but slowed his pace a little as he saw who his rescuer was. It was a space patrol officer, and there was a stern expression on his face that boded no good.

"H-hi, officer," he said with a forced smile. "I'm glad you found my beacon and came. My hyperdrive burned out—"

"More than that burned out," the space officer interrupted him. "Your brains did too—if you had any to start with. Do you know what you've done? Do you?"

"Why—why . . . " Ramone stammered.

"The trouble with you private citizens that get stuck away from space-drive distance of a service station is that you don't consider all the factors of what you do."

"What did I overlook?" Ramone asked. "I followed all the instructions in the guide book on dealing with natives and building a beacon. You found me all right . . . "

"See all that nice green stuff?" the officer said, waving his arm in a semicircle. "Looks nice, doesn't it. Thousands of square miles of farms, an agrarian population. The only thing wrong with it is that when you placed it all in a stasis field you created a curvature that lifted the whole area just high enough so that the streams feeding it found new channels."

"You mean this all became desert?" Ramone asked.

"That's right," the officer said with exaggerated calm. "With the powers invested in me by the Supreme Council I'm impounding your spaceship and taking your driver's license away until you equip your ship with

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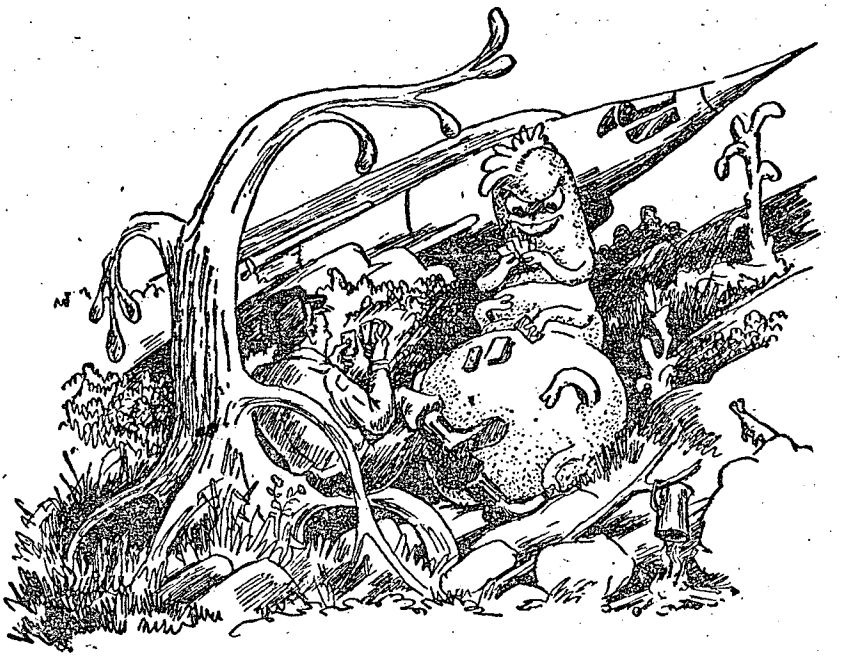
an interlock on the spacedrive-hyperdrive complex. The wrecker is on its way to pick your ship up. Anybody else on board? I'll take you home—and stay there."

Ramone hurried back into the ship, and emerged shortly with Mishi in tow.

The wrecker had appeared and was settling over Ramone's ship. As Ramone and Mishi followed the officer into his ship, the wrecker settled onto the other ship and fastened its magnetic grapples.

Both ships rose slowly together, heading westward. The blue waters of the Mediterranian were to the north, and the sharp outlines of the gigantic pyramid rose behind them on its small island of scorched ground which was to soon spread and become a desert that covered all of northern Africa. The little people, who had been watching them depart, returned with religious zeal to the construction of more pyramids, inspired by the memory and inspiration of Amon Ra and Isis.

THE END



"If I may say so, Earthmen are not very good gin-rummy players, are they, Mr. Hamling?"

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DEVILS, DEROS, AND DETERMINED HOSES

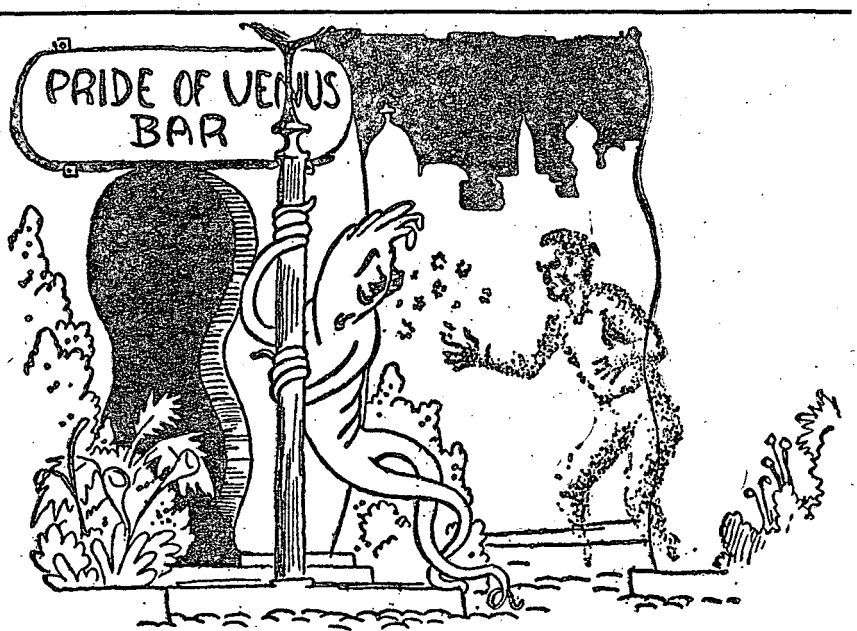
IN the January 1950 OTHER WORLDS we ran an article entitled "Quick, Shaver, The Hose" which dealt with the incident of a hose burrowing into the ground despite the combined efforts of six men to withdraw it. It was finally necessary to dig a hole nine feet across and six feet deep to recover the wandering hose. No one provided a satisfactory solution.

Time passed, and garden hoses seemed to be behaving normally until two little Washington, D. C. boys decided to dig a hole in the vacant lot next door and try to reach China. Johnny Hardester, four years old, and Freddie Richard, who is five, knew that they could reach China if they just dug deep enough but digging is hard work on a hot June day. To make the job easier, Johnny stuck the nozzle of the hose into the ground to soften the dirt a little bit—and that's when it happened. The hose kept burrowing deeper into the ground, evidently having made up its mind to reach China under its own power.

According to the boys, everytime they tried to remove the hose from the ground "the devil or something" would pull it back down. Their efforts eventually attracted the attention of the so-called "bigger boys" who complacently announced that it was "just an ordinary old phenomenon" and attempted, quite unsuccessfully, to withdraw the errant hose. By this time, the police had arrived on the scene, agreed that it looked like an ordinary old phenomenon and commenced tugging at the hose. The hose tugged back, leaving some slightly bewildered policemen who advanced the startling theory that "It's got something to do with suction, or something like that."

And that's how the situation stood at the close of the day. The consensus of opinion was that it was just an ordinary old phenomenon, but the hose remained in the ground, headed for China.

Our only comment on the situation is that the day has passed beyond recall when a man could sprinkle the lawn and be concerned only with getting the task done; nowadays he has to keep a close watch on the hose or it may elude his grasp and tunnel out of sight before he can catch it.



"Omigosh, I'm seeing humans again!"

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Illustration by Malcolm Smith

FIVE little Green girls wrangled on the sidewalk; the central disputants held, one the legs, and the other the arms, of a large doll.

"You said I could have her today," yelled Legs, bitterly.

"No, I didn't. You had her yesterday," screamed Arms. "I want her."

"You said I could," Legs persisted doggedly.

"She's mine. You let her go." Arms tugged violently. The doll's stitches strained, but it held together. "Will you let *go*?" howled the one who held

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THE LIVING LIES

By JOHN BEYNON

The color line on Venus was the most vivid and varied in the solar system—and it added up to *livid* hate. The cause was in a cruel deception that made every newborn child a "living lie."

the arms.

On the last word she tugged with all her weight. The suffering doll's arms tore off. The child, still holding them, staggered back and fell into the roadway. Her shriek, as a wheel crushed her, was drowned in the screams of her four little friends.

Leonie Ward, her hands on the wheel, her foot hard down on the brake, did not scream. Something seemed to take her by the throat, she felt her heart turn over inside her and her face went sickly pale. For an instant everything appeared to stop, held in a ghastly tableau. The people transfixed in the street, the car hanging on its gyroscopes, Leonie frozen in the driving seat; the only sound an unforgettable scream.

A woman flung herself into the road and dragged the child's crushed body from between the wheels. For a moment she clasped it, then she looked up. The girl, half-stunned, had not moved from the wheel; she shivered as their eyes met. The woman's face and the hands were as green as those of the child she held; it made her hatred and anguish the more horribly terrifying. Without lowering her burning eyes, crouched with the dead child pressed against her, she began to scream threats and curses.

There was a crowd round the car now, a ring of green faced men and women rapidly pressing closer. Still Leonie sat unmoving, unable to think or act, but feeling the growing hostility of the crowd.

Two burly men in uniform came shouldering their way through the press. They made a strange contrast with the others, for their faces beneath their padded hats and their hands, already clutching batons in readiness for trouble, were a brilliant magenta in color. They worked close to the cream car and began pushing the people back.

"Now then, get along. Move along there."

One of them went to the mother of the child. Not unkindly he laid a hand on her shoulder. She shook it off, sprang to her feet and spat at him.

"Don't you touch me, you filthy Red."

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There was a murmur in the green-faced crowd. The woman seemed to forget him for a moment. She leaped toward the car and clawed at Leonie through the open window.

"You murderess. I'll kill you for that."

A uniformed arm came over her shoulder and pulled her away. She turned and raked at the man's red face with her nails. He put up a hand to save his eyes.

"Bloody Green bitch," he muttered, fending her off.

"D'you hear that?" she shrieked. "D'you hear what he called me?"

The crowd had. Someone put an arm round the red man's throat and dragged him backward. Half a dozen green-faced men and women leapt upon him; simultaneously his companion went down in a whirl of crashing fists. From one of the fallen policemen came a scream of shuddering agony. It brought Leonie suddenly alive again. In terror she struck at the green arms reaching in to seize her, desperately she sought to restart the engine. With panic in her veins she did not care if she cut down a dozen of the Green people if she could only thrust clear of the mob. But even as the engine came to life she felt the car rise and sway, and knew that they had lifted the driving wheel clear off the ground. A green hand caught her wrist and wrenched it off the wheel, she was dragged half out of the window. Her shoulder socket hurt like fire; she felt her arm being torn off like the doll's. A row of gloating green faces awaited her. Then the whole car tilted beneath her and a curtain of black fell over everything.

She was lying on her back, looking up at a white ceiling. There was a moment before it all came back, then, fearfully, she turned her head. Close beside her she saw a face that was not green, magenta or black, but the pink and white of her own race. She burst into tears of relief, aware through them of a hand which patted her shoulder and a voice which tried to soothe her, but unable to stop the storm of weeping.

"I'm sorry," she said at last, as it subsided. "I'm sorry to be such a fool."

"Nonsense," a voice told her. "Best thing you could have done. Now drink this. No, don't try to move. I'll hold it."

A hand raised her head slightly. Another held a glass to her lips. The spirit stung her throat, but it worked like an elixir. In a few minutes she began to feel like an utterly new person.

She turned and studied the man beside her. Later middle aged, fifty-five, perhaps sixty, she judged. His hair was mostly grey, and surmounted a finely shaped, ascetic type of face. The eyes were grey, too, and kindly, with fine webs of little wrinkles at the corners; the mouth was firm, but without hardness.

"What happened? Where am I? Who are you?" she asked, almost in one sentence.

The man smiled.

"My name is Francis Clouster and this is my house. A friend of mine

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brought you here."

"But how did I get out of that crowd?"

"He'll be able to tell you that better than I can. I'll call him." He went to the door and opened it. "Jimmy," he said, "the lady would like to see you."

Leonie recoiled involuntarily at the sight of the man who came in. She had expected a man of her own kind. The newcomer was green as a grass lawn. The two men either did not notice or affected not to notice her movement.

"This is Jimmy Craven," the older man introduced, "Miss . . . ?"

"Leonie Ward," Leonie told them.

"Miss Ward would like to hear what happened, Jimmy," said the older.

"I happened to be there when the accident took place," the Green man said. "It was quite obvious to anyone who saw it that no driver could have avoided it. You were as quick on the brake as anyone could possibly be. No blame whatever can be attached to you. But most of the people who were in the crowd didn't actually see it happen. Even so, it might have passed off quietly but for that Red policeman.

"Just as your car went over, a squad of Red police turned up. Green police might have smoothed things over, but that mob was just right for trouble with Reds, they'd killed two already, and they went bald headed for this lot. In the mix-up I saw that half-crazy woman making for you. Your left arm was jammed under the car so that you couldn't have fought her off, even if you'd been conscious. So I chased her off, managed to get your arm free, and carried you out of the mess. If anybody noticed they probably thought you were an injured Green, because I'd put a rug over you."

Leonie was watching him as he talked, deciding that he was personable and, but for his coloring, might have been handsome. Possibly in the eyes of another Green he actually was so.

She thanked him as he stopped. He shook his head.

"It was common justice. The accident was in no way your fault. That woman was crazy enough to have killed you, or defaced you for life. If you don't mind my saying so, it was extremely rash of you to come here alone at all. And in the circumstances you are lucky to have got off as lightly as you have done."

"I don't feel as if I had got off exactly lightly."

"You've been pretty well bruised," put in Clouster, "but your main injuries are a compound fracture of the left forearm and a badly strained right shoulder."

"I wonder the shoulder wasn't dislocated; it felt like it. But, tell me, why shouldn't I have come here alone?"

"I should have thought that was obvious enough."

"Do you mean I might have been attacked even if there had not been an accident?"

"I do."

"But why?"

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Her host and the Green man looked at one another.

"Weren't you warned against it?" Clouster asked.

"Oh, yes, they did say something. But they used to tell me to be careful of all sorts of places on Earth and nothing ever happened."

"Venus," said Clouster, "is not Earth. Do you mean you've only just come here?"

"Well, I've only just come back — about a month ago — they sent me to be educated on Earth. I was very young when I left."

"I see. Well, I'm afraid you're going to find that a lot of things you can take for granted on Earth are very different on Venus. There is not the problem there of the Reds, the Blacks, the Whites of our kind, and the Greens of Jimmy's."

"There are Black men on Earth."

"So there are, but they have learned to co-operate with Whites and Yellows."

"They must be very different from our Blacks," the Green man put in, bitterly. "All ours want to do is rule."

He looked up and caught the older man's expression.

"Yes, I know that's not what you like to hear, Francis, but, hell, it's true."

"And the Greens?" inquired Clouster.

"They want justice and permission to live in peace: is that too much?"

"That's just what the Blacks tell me."

"Oh, well, if you believe them — "

"Why not try believing them a bit, Jimmy? After all, what's the difference beyond the color of our skins?"

The Green man rose.

"Sorry. If you're going to preach, Francis, I'm leaving. Goodbye, Miss Ward. I'm glad to have been able to help you."

Francis Clouster looked at the door as it shut.

"And there," he said, turning back to Leonie. "There you have the state of Venus in a nutshell."

"Tell me some more about it," Leonie said.

"All right. But hadn't you better send some message to your family first? I'm afraid it won't be possible for them to fetch you to-night. There's too much trouble round here, but you ought to let them know. I'll bring you the telephone."

Leonie spoke into the instrument while he held it. It roused in her the feeling, always latent, that in coming back to Venus she had gone back a few centuries. Telephones, because radio wouldn't work on Venus, but it wasn't only the lack of radio. . . .

Mr. Mattington Ward returned to the dinner table.

"It was Leonie," he explained to his guests. "She's over in Chellan. Bit knocked about in a Green and Red riot, I'm afraid. Tells me not to worry, but to come over and fetch her in the morning when the neighborhood's quietened down a bit. She's right, too. Police say there's quite a bit of trouble down there.

The most important of his guests looked at him hard. Wilfred Baisham, head of the Venus Mineral Products Consolidation, had not only a domi-

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nating position, but an authoritative personality.

"Chellan?" he said. "What the devil was your daughter doing in Chellan?"

"Taking a short cut, I understand."

Mr. Ward, if he resented his guest's tone, did not show it.

"But Chellan!"

"I've warned her, of course, but I suppose she didn't really appreciate it. I don't suppose it's too easy for her to grasp at first."

Mr. Baisham said, weightily:

"I don't approve of the practice of sending Venus-born children to Earth for education. It gives them false standards. How can they be expected to have a proper appreciation of our system when they are educated in another. It just gives them subversive ideas which they have to unlearn before or after they get into trouble."

Mr. Ward made no reply. Indeed, at the back of his mind, he agreed with his guest. He would have preferred to have Leonie educated at home and would have done so but for the promise he had made to her mother. He had kept that promise in spite of a feeling that he was alienating his child and a fear that she might not be able to feel at home on Venus any more than her Earthborn mother had done.

"Who's looking after her?" Mr. Baisham inquired.

"Some people called Clouster, I gather."

"Oh, yes, I know. Idealists, type that might have been missionaries on Earth at one time. They do some kind of social work in Chellan. They'll look after her all right." He smiled at a thought. "Funny, isn't it, these people who give their lives to spreading brotherly love among Greens, Reds and Blacks. You'd think it would dawn on them that if people have to be told to love one another all the time there must be some pretty good reason why they don't. But it doesn't seem to. Well, it's probably a good thing; it'll teach your daughter to keep clear of Chellan and such places in future."

Again Mr. Ward found himself in agreement. Leonie had given him no details of her injuries so that his impression was that she had had a scare — there was nothing like a touch of that kind of wind up to show a girl the necessity for conventions and taboos.

"Now tell me about Venus," Leonie directed. "Nobody has, except for what I learned at school. It's all so usual to everyone here that they don't bother to explain any of it. Now and then they say 'Don't,' that's all. Now, like the geography books: 'The inhabitants of Venus are of four types . . . '"

" . . . the Whites, the Greens, the Reds and the Blacks," he took her up. "But I quarrel with your word 'types.' They are all the same type — only their skins are different colors."

"They wouldn't thank you for that from what I've heard."

He nodded. "They wouldn't; that's the tragedy."

He went on to describe the Venusian social state, speaking not as a

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White, but as one who had tried to consider himself as one of all the four classes. As for the Whites, their position was simple, they were of Earth stock on both sides and some of them actually Earth born. They dominated socially, industrially, commercially: they were, in fact, the undisputed ruling class, they despised the colored peoples, and the one common sentiment of the three colors was dislike, tempered by fear, of the Whites.

Leonie nodded. "Something like all the little nations on Earth before the Revolutions led up to the Great Union," she suggested.

"Very like, in some ways," Francis Clouster agreed, "but even more tragic here. On Earth there were physical differences as well as different languages to be overcome. Here the language is the same, the physical structure is identical. They differ in nothing but their skins — and they do not, they refuse to, know it. My wife and I know it. We have lived among Greens, Reds and Blacks; we have friends of each color whom we trust, but who would hate one another at sight if we were to allow them to meet. You saw just now how even an intelligent Green reacts when one mentions a Black."

"But he saved me — a White."

"Certainly. You are a girl and very good looking. The dislike of the colors for the Whites is different from their dislike of one another, it is based on envy, not contempt. That makes a lot of difference, you see. I don't want to be uncharitable, but it wouldn't surprise me to hear that Jimmy is rather fancying himself for having rescued a White girl."

He went on to talk of the three colors and the hatred they held for one another. How the Reds believed that the Blacks were dirty and dishonest, and the Greens were vicious and sly to a man: how the Greens and Blacks considered the Reds to be bullies and braggarts, frequently unstable in the small amount of brain they possessed. How the children of all three groups grew up in their homes and in their separate schools, hearing these things from their earliest years and believing them.

"There's a parallel for that, too, in Earth history," Leonie observed. "There was teaching like that against Jews."

"Certainly. There are plenty of parallels. Too many. But the good one is yet to come." He sat silent a minute, lost in thought.

"You mean like the Great Union?"

He nodded. "There was a day on Earth when the people revolted. They refused any longer to be thrown into slaughter of and by people of whom they knew nothing, for the profit of people who exploited them. They rose against it, one, another, and another, to throw out their rulers and rule themselves. And so came the Great Union. Government of the People, by the People, for the People, over the whole Earth. How long will Venus have to wait for that?"

"You are a revolutionary?"

He looked at her steadily. "Yes, I suppose I am that. A revolutionist with no party to lead," he smiled

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wryly. "Quite harmless to the Whites and their authorities, I assure you. If I were to collect a following of Greens, the Blacks and Reds would unite to crush us: if I collected Reds the Blacks and Greens would combine. We should slaughter one another while the Whites went on living comfortably, untroubled."

"But how did this happen? Who are these colored peoples, where did they come from, and why do they hate one another so much?"

"That is not clear. They are said to be descendants of the first Earthmen who came to Venus long ago and mated with the natives. The theory is that the natives died out from contact with civilization as some races died on Earth, but not before the ancestors of our present Blacks, Reds and Greens were fairly numerous."

"What else could it be?"

"Exactly. What else?"

Leonie had opened her mouth to speak again when the door suddenly swung wide. A young man, green as her rescuer had been, strode in without noticing her where she lay on the day-bed.

"Hullo, Dad, is Mother a . . . " he broke off suddenly as he caught sight of her. There was a moment's silence.

"Is Mother Clouster about, Francis?" he asked, in an uncertain tone.

Leonie returned home to spend her convalescence in her father's house on a slight rise overlooking the city of Tallor. The period coincided with that nostalgic depression which afflicts all but a few of the new arrived or newly returned on Venus. Leonie felt it the more since the best antidote of exercise was barred for her.

The garden was planted in pathetic imitation of gardens on Earth, with plants and flowers specially imported, yet in spite of sunlight lamps and prepared soil the blooms were pallid versions of those which grew naturally in Earthly gardens. They were unnatural, too, in losing their seasons, so that here, at the end of the Venus winter, Leonie discovered spring and autumn flowers struggling into bloom together. From the terrace where she spent most of her time she could make out the suburbs, Chellan where the Greens lived, Barro the Red quarter, Tingan which was almost entirely Blacks.

And in each she could see the big blocks of factories and warehouses where the people worked. North lay the cleared and cultivated country where they grew either indigenous crops or species bred by careful crossing with strains from Earth. West, where the ground was lower and waterlogged rose the thick wall of swamp forest cut by the broad channel to the sea. South lay more forest, it looked weakly and unhealthy to her eyes because of the paleness of its green, but, nevertheless, it was formed in reality of sturdy Venusian trees quite different from the soft growths of the swamp forest.

Venus knows no horizon line. All the way round the scene grew hazy at the edges, disappearing in the haze which thickened inperceptibly into the clouds. Sometimes above the southern forest she saw the clouds glow red as if a sunset tried to strug-

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gle through them; there was a distant, trembling roar and one knew that a rocket ship had arrived or had taken off from the great port clearing twenty miles beyond the city.

It was the haze and the ever hanging clouds which depressed the Earth-accustomed. Never to see the sun, never to have a clear view, never to see a sharp cut shadow on the ground; despite the fact that the light was good its perpetual diffusion made them feel that they were living in a kind of monotony of twilight.

Everybody assured Leonie that this was to be expected; that all newcomers felt a lowering of spirit at first, and that it would pass, but she found it hard to believe. She was aware of a growing dislike for the planet, for its inhabitants, and for the kind of life which lay before her. She did not care for the standards of her father's friends. She found in them a self-satisfied, almost callous, strain which was continually shocking her Earth-trained mind. The narrowness of their interests bored her and the lavishness of their style of living troubled her.

In Milota, their residential district of Tallor, no luxury that money could buy went unbought. Down in the colored districts there was poverty and struggle without end, men and women living in warrens which must surely be as bad as those of Earth before the Great Union. Even Rome at its greatest, Leonie felt, could scarcely have shown greater discrepancies, yet it left Milota undisturbed. Beyond the occasional distribution of a little condescending charity Milota maintained its amusements and pursuits as though the people whose labor supported it did not exist.

It was the dull weeks of her convalescence which made her give more attention to those things than she might otherwise have spared; which made her feel strongly the sense of being a stranger among strangers, and set her clinging grimly to anything which made Earth seem closer. Much of her time was spent with a little recorder in her lap through which she dictated endless letter-reels of her impressions to her distant friends. Whenever a mail rocket came in she fell upon the reels addressed to her and hurried away to a quiet corner where she could listen to the little voices coming out of the machine, with her eyes closed, pretending that Venus did not exist. It was no way to cure Earth-sickness, but she did not wish to be cured. For the same reason she burnt herself painfully with her sunlamp, over-using it for fear she might under-use it and grow pale like a true Venus dweller.

There was little company for her during the long days and seldom, except in the evenings, anyone to talk to but the Magenta-Red house servants. From them she learned much to substantiate the things she had heard from Francis Clouster down in Chellan. The mention of a Black or a Green to any of them brought a curl of the lip which, off duty, would undoubtedly have been a sneer. The Reds, she discovered, considered themselves the aristocrats of the colored peoples, ranking a little below

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the Whites themselves. It was later she learned directly the Greens' opinions of the Reds — that not only were they bullies as Clouster had said, but that they were toadies and sycophants of the Whites, who chose them for house-servants and bribed them into meanness. It was impossible to get past those things, in every direction these barriers of color cropped up — and every worth-while position was reserved for the Whites.

In those eight weeks was thoroughly planted and set an idea which was never uprooted — that the basis of Venusian society was a state of hatred and spite.

By the time she was recovered enough to drive the new car with which her father had replaced the smashed one, spring had come and the vegetation, never slow of growth, was bursting upward and outward with a furious energy almost alarming to a stranger. It was a season when hours of work in the factories had to be cut, and Leonie went out with parties of other Whites to watch the released workers fighting the encroaching forest back from the city's outskirts and keeping it off the cultivated lands with hatchets and flame throwers.

There were expeditions to the flower groves. She took part in them but they disappointed her. Venusian flowers were almost all simple and primitive, not unlike magnolias, lovely to touch, making the air heavy and sweet with their scent, but appealing little to the eye. All the way they went they passed gangs of Greens or Blacks and sometimes Reds, hacking and burning back the vegetation which threatened to choke the roads.

There was another expedition which took her down to the sea. That was somewhat disappointing, too. The sea when reached looked much as the sea does anywhere else on a dull day, and you couldn't do anything with it when you got there: you couldn't go out in a small boat, because one good snap from one of the saurians and it would be the end of you and the boat; and you couldn't bathe because the water swarmed with tiny sharp toothed fish who would attack in thousands and have all the flesh off your bones in a few minutes. Even a picnic meal was a fidgety business; one of the party had to act sentry all the time for fear something or other dangerously nasty should come crawling out of the sea. There were occasional longer jaunts by plane to other cities which neither in themselves nor their inhabitants were noticeably different from Tallor.

Leonie began to find the first strangeness wearing off. Her eyes became accustomed to the softer colorings and she began to perceive delicacy of shading where before she had dismissed a view as merely "grey." The scarcely recognized sense of claustrophobia caused by the hazy blanketing of all horizons began to wear off. But she refused to believe that she liked Venus any more. The furthest she would go was to admit now that it might be made just tolerable, whereas before she had not believed even that.

One of the first things she had

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done when she was able to get about was to join a society of Whites which proclaimed charitable and philanthropic intentions towards the less fortunately colored. It took her one meeting to discover that it existed chiefly to enhance the self-esteem of its own members, and three to resign, somewhat curtly, her association with it. Inquiries revealed another society, but one which existed it seemed, solely to rival the first. It took her some little time to get on to the track of one which appeared to have more serious intentions than social ambitions, and it was Francis Clouster who told her of its existence.

She had visited him several times — taking precautions suitable for the district — partly to thank him and his wife, Marion, for their care, but even more because they were the only people she knew who seemed to share in any way her own feelings on the injustices of Venusian life.

She pleased him by her opinion of the societies she had already investigated.

"Rubbishy," he agreed. "The real effect of charitable societies like that is to bolster up the very conditions which make them necessary."

"But there must be others who are seriously interested?"

He looked at her thoughtfully.

"You might try The Pan-Venus Club, perhaps."

"Do you belong?"

"I did. I—er—fell out with them. It might be wiser not to tell them you know me."

"Why did you fall out?"

He shrugged. "Difference of views." Changing the subject he asked:

"Do you really still feel as you did, even after living all this time up at Milota?"

"More, I think. I look at the people there, and I remember what happened down there. I can still see that policeman's horror as he went down, I can still hear him scream as those savages killed him with their bare hands. It's not the kind of thing one forgets. It means that there's something dreadfully, tragically wrong underneath. You can't build up a decent world with that kind of beastliness in the foundations."

"'Savages' isn't very kind to my friends the Greens."

"I know, but it's true. They were savages at that moment. It's no good pretending they weren't. The thing to do is to change the system which makes them savages."

"So easy to say."

"Yes. I begin to understand what you were telling me more now. But it can be done. If it could be done on Earth, and it was, it can most certainly be done on Venus."

"It will be — one day."

She looked at him, wondering at his tone.

"You told me you were a revolutionary."

"I am, but I am not a firebrand. You don't know these people yet. Still at the back of your mind you feel you have only to say loudly enough 'Unite and this World is Yours' for them to perceive its truth. I know that that is not the way of it. First you've got to make these people *want* to rescue themselves. You talk

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to a bunch of, say, Greens on the wage rate — which is disgustingly insufficient. And what do you find their greatest interest is? To raise it, you would say. Well, you'd be wrong. Their real pressing anxiety is lest the Reds or the Blacks get more. That's the kind of thing you're up against."

"But if you show them . . . ."

"They don't want to be shown, they don't want reason. They're too fond of their discontents. Doesn't that discourage you?"

"Why should you want to discourage me?"

"I don't. But nor do I want to see you run headlong into trouble — dangerous trouble. If you want to go on, do so by all means, but do it with your eyes open. Know what you are handling, and you may light a lamp on the road to freedom: ignore the human factor and you may be fuel for reaction."

Francis and Marion Clouster saw her off together as she left. There was a frown on the woman's face as the car drove off.

"What do you think?" she asked as they went back indoors.

Francis fingered his chin.

"Good stuff, but it's early to judge. Plenty of them came here from Earth feeling just like that. What are they now? Hostesses in the big Milota houses. Crown opinion too strong for them. Still, we shall see, we shall see."

"I hear she's seeing a lot of young David Sherrick."

Francis looked at her in surprise.

"Really, the things you manage to hear, shut away down here."

"That might be interesting, don't you think?"

"It might—and then again it might be just another couple of young marrieds in a new house on Milota."

"That girl of yours settling down all right?" inquired Wilfred Baisham, depositing the ash of his cigar with careful delicacy.

"So, so," said Mr. Ward. "Takes time, of course. But she's young. They all have these half-baked, socialistic ideas when they're young, but they grow out of them."

"Half-baked?" inquired Mr. Baisham, with a lift of his eyebrows. "What about the Great Union?"

"Yes, of course. But it can't happen here."

"Comforting theory. All Milota says that. Don't you ever have less comfortable moments when it occurs to you that it might very easily happen here?"

Mr. Ward looked up, startled and uncertain.

"You don't mean that?"

"I decidedly do."

"But our order of society is perfectly stable."

"My good Ward, there never was an order of society yet which did not have to protect itself against disintegration — not just now and then, but continuously. Any form of society is, after all, a method of training Nature, but Nature never sleeps, and never gives in. Just a little too much of this 'it can't happen here' stuff, and one day — Pouf! And you and I, your mills and my mines — where are we?"

"But I had no idea of this, Bais-

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ham, what are we doing about it?"

"Oh, about the same as usual. Just seeing that it doesn't take place."

Mattington Ward reached for another cigar and lit it.

"Confound you, Baisham, for a moment you scared me."

"If your Leonie had her way it would happen here, from what they tell me."

"She's hardly more than a child, you know. It's just these notions she picked up on Earth, she'll forget them. But I must say I see more and more clearly that it was a mistake ever to send her. She wouldn't have had all this readjustment to go through if she'd stayed here."

"You're right. The less contact between us and Earth except in the way of trade, the better."

"Anyway, Leonie's got another interest that's soon going to put paid to all that," said her father. "Dr. Sherrick."

"Young David Sherrick! Well, I'm glad to hear that. Nothing like a little affair of that kind for knocking that sort of nonsense out of their heads."

"I'm hoping it'll be more than an affair."

"Good. Fine young couple. By the way, I hear she goes down Chellan way to see that queer fish Clouster sometimes. See that she goes somewhere else on Wednesday."

"Why?"

"Going to be trouble. Greens and Blacks. Only don't tell anyone I told you."

Dr. Sherrick came down the hospital steps to see a familiar car balanced patiently on its gyroscopes before the entrance. He went up to it.

"Hullo, Leonie. What are you doing here?"

"Waiting to take you for a run I hope. Get in."

He opened the door and slid in beside her. The car tilted slightly and then readjusted itself.

"But I thought you were at the Pan-Venus Club?" he said, as they started.

"I should have been, but they've chucked me out—or at least asked me to resign. Same thing."

David grunted.

"You're not surprised?" she inquired.

"Not much."

They rode for a mile or two in silence.

"What did you say?" he asked. "I mean, to make them chuck you out."

"I told them that they were dabblers. That if they really believed all the stuff they talk about the equality of man it would not be a club just for Whites, but for all colors—and with equal standing for all members. I said they were trying to square their consciences by talking and not doing—and seemed to be succeeding pretty well, to no one's profit. I asked them to give me one example of one *practical* way in which they had tried to lower the color hatred. And—oh well, quite a lot more."

"That makes me even less surprised. What did you expect them to do? Cheer?"

"I didn't care. I just wanted to

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jolt them a bit."

"Well, I gather you did that."

Leonie stopped the car.

"David, they made me so *angry*. Even *they* don't really care how these wretched people go on quarreling and killing one another in their slums. Does anyone care?"

"Aren't you doing them an injustice? I think if you talked to them separately you'd find they genuinely care, but they're stuck. They don't know what to do."

"If they are, they've been stuck all their lives."

"They've learnt some of the things not to do. For instance, I'm willing to bet that one thing you wanted them to do was to preach to all three colored peoples that they are the same under their skins?"

"Yes, I did say something like that. In fact, I offered to do it."

"Well, there's quite enough reason for asking you to resign. They know better than that. When will you understand, Leonie, that each of the three colors considers itself superior to the others? A Black man is actually *proud* of being black because he thinks it shows he has none of the nasty characteristics he imputes to the Reds and Greens."

"But . . ."

"Leonie, dear, there isn't any but to that. It's a fact."

"It's also a fact that there's no racial difference. There must be some way of telling them that."

"Telling, but not convincing. Listen, Leonie, I'll tell you a story. I had a friend called Dick. We went through all our medical training together and qualified about the same time. Both of us felt, knew in our hearts, that this is a rotten system and that something ought to be done to clear it up. He, I suppose, felt more badly about it than I did, anyway, saw it more simply—he was more like you, and I was more like your Pan-Venus people.

"After we passed out he went and set up a practice among the Reds in Barro. He wasn't popular, the practice began to fall off the moment he took it over, but he was a damned good man at his job, so he managed to keep going although they didn't like him. And he knew well enough *why* they didn't like him—it was because they knew that he refused to agree with them when they ran down Greens and Blacks. But he thought he could get over that. His idea was that if he went on doctoring and doing the best he could for them they'd gradually come around to paying some attention to what he said.

"My own belief is that they wouldn't. The furthest they would have gone was to admit that he knew his particular job, but was quite obviously crazy in certain directions, notably on the racial question. Patience would have taken them that far, but unfortunately he hadn't much gift of patience. Things went too slowly for him and he decided to speed them up.

"He did it at a public health meeting. The hall was packed with Reds, and what must Dick do but get up and tell them that not only were they every bit as good as the Whites, which

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they didn't mind, but that the Greens and Blacks were every bit as good as the Whites, too. It was brave, but it was madness. They went for him like tigers, of course."

"What happened?" Leonie asked.

David Sherrick looked at his hands, avoiding her eyes.

"Nobody ever told the exact details, but the next day most of his clothing was found at the foot of a tree on the edge of the swamp forest. It was ripped to pieces and blood-stained. There were some ropes loosely tied round the tree, marks which showed that saurians had been there —and a few human bones, that was all . . ."

Neither spoke for a few minutes. It was David who went on.

"There have been other things like that. Everyone has heard of them, can you blame the Pan-Venus people for being careful? And if the Reds hadn't dealt with Dick the Whites would have."

"The Whites?"

"Well, the Government—it's the same thing. He'd be in prison now for incitement to break the peace, subversive activities or something of the kind.

"You see, Leonie, I've already lost one friend, my best friend, through this and I've no wish to see what happened to Dick Clouster happen to you."

Leonie was brought up short by the name.

"Clouster? Was he related to Francis Clouster who lives down in Chellan?"

"Yes, he was his son, only son."

Leonie opened her mouth to speak, and then thought better of it. There was a pause which she broke.

"But, David, something must be done. You think that, don't you?"

"I probably think it even more strongly than you do, Leonie. As a doctor I come into contact with its actual results. In hospital we're never without cases who've been beaten up for no reason but their color. And when there's a big row we're rushed off our feet with the wounded. It's stupid and cruel, it causes endless suffering—you know how easily any cut gets infected here—it wastes our time when we might be doing really important work. God knows there are plenty of fevers to be tackled yet. Of course, something must be done, and we ought to do it. Damn it, it was the doctors who made it possible to colonize Venus at all by conquering rheumatism. But for that no one could have stood this climate, now it's up to us to make it worth living in. But how? I wouldn't mind using my life on it, but I'm hanged if I'm going to waste my life on it as Dick did. Listen, I'll tell you another story.

"Three days ago they brought a Green woman in. She was dreadfully hurt. Heaven knows why she was still alive, but she was. There was nothing we could do for her but give her some dope. And I'll tell you why it happened. You know, don't you, that it's about the equivalent of suicide for any woman on Venus to have a child anywhere but in a hospital?"

"Streptococcus infection?"

"Exactly. But sometimes by accident it does happen. Well, it had

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happened to this woman. When her husband saw that the baby was white, he went crazy. He killed the child, went for his wife with a knife and then ran out into the street and killed the first White he saw, just to show what he thought of us."

"Because the baby was white? What would he have done if it had been red?" said Leonie.

David looked at her oddly.

"It . . ." he began, and then checked himself. "And that's not an isolated instance by any means. It's a thing which is deliberately built up in their schools and their homes."

"Deliberately."

"I said deliberately."

Leonie frowned.

"I don't think I understand. Isn't it mostly a prejudice handed on in the families?"

"It is. But who stands to gain from that prejudice? Who rules and owns Venus?"

"The Whites, I suppose."

"Exactly. The people living in luxury on Milota — and all the Milotas in the other cities. Don't you see? It's an old, old game. Make the people distrust one another, keep them at loggerheads, prevent them from uniting for their rights and you can rule. Let them combine and you're sunk. Your precious societies on Milota like to patronize, but they don't want Reds, Greens and Blacks to combine, that'd be the end of the Whites' rule—and they know it."

Leonie was silent, trying to grasp this new aspect. Hitherto she had believed at the back of her mind that her friends on Milota were merely apathetic and selfish, that they recognized the shamefulness of affairs but did not bother to bestir themselves to mend it. It required reorientation to see them as deliberate partisans. She found it difficult. And yet, why not? Wars on Earth had been engineered and countless people slaughtered for ends no more noble—indeed there were some who claimed that that was almost invariably the motive. But—her own father and his friends intentionally keeping the colored peoples at enmity for their own profit? That was more than she could take in. Her feelings rejected it in spite of her reason.

"I can't believe it."

"Haven't they tried to laugh you out of it, argue you out of it? Have they lost any opportunity of impressing on you that liberty, equality and fraternity may work on Earth, but it won't do so here? Have they given you any encouragement whatever?"

Leonie turned and gazed miserably at him. She shook her head. It was perfectly true, every word. They had been tolerant sometimes as one might to a child, never more than that. She began to see it now. Milota and its rule would be swept away in a moment if the people rose and took their rights. David was watching her intently. He saw her take the shock, waver a moment in divided loyalties, then a hardening light in her eyes, a firmer line to her lips.

"There is," she said slowly. "There is a kind of absolute right. The right of any human being to freedom and equality of opportunity. And there

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is an absolute wrong; to enslave, and to incite to murder."

David Sherrick sighed.

"I was afraid of that. The other way would have been so much easier for you, Leonie, dear. And yet I'm glad, so glad. You're one of the real people, Leonie."

He looked at her seriously. Her eyes dropped and she turned her head away.

"No, no, darling, don't cry," he said.

She clung to him for a few moments.

"David. I'm sorry. I—I feel as if I had lost something—something very precious."

"You have, dear, but that had to be. You had come to the point where something had to be lost—either your illusions, or your principles."

There was a silence, neither spoke for some minutes. Then David slipped his arm away from her. He looked straight before him. His tone was hard as he spoke.

"Leonie, dear, I am going to shock you, I'm afraid. But I must. I am going to put myself in your hands because I trust you, because I know that you are the most genuine person I have ever met. And because I love you for it, Leonie, I am going to break a solemn oath . . ."

"David . . ."

"I am, because it is an oath which should never have been asked or given, there should have been no need for it." For one last moment he hesitated on the brink, then he plunged.

"You asked what would have happened if the Green woman's baby had been red."

"Yes."

"Well, it couldn't have been. That's all."

"I don't understand. If it could be white. . . ."

"Leonie, all the babies are white. Red, Black, Green women: they all have white babies. Don't you see?"

Nobody knew how nor quite when it had begun, David told her. It must have been back in the early days of colonization when men were struggling for a foothold on Venus. In those days life had been a horribly uncertain business. Exploration had been dangerous, uncounted hundreds of men had gone out from the settlements so laboriously established and had never returned. The saurians had not learned from experience to avoid the high land and keep to the water and the marshes. Scientific acclimatization had not yet been developed, so that the heat and humidity were a burden to everyone. The mortality rate was appalling. Fevers, infections in wounds, and, worst of all, rheumatic afflictions carried men and women off in such numbers that at one time the idea of permanent colonization was all but abandoned.

They were times of chaos and uncertainty when even the least adventurous had no more than a slippery hold on life. It was then that someone's ingenuity managed to establish it. It could never have been done on Earth, but on Venus where a woman must give birth to her child in the hospital or face certain death, it was

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somehow accomplished.

But if the how and when were uncertain, the why was plain. Colonization began away back in the heyday of international finance in the days before the Great Union when groups of interests lived comfortably out of the profits which came from pitting one section of the Earth's population against another. It was a technique developed over centuries, seldom failing, and yet unperceived for generations by the mind of the common man. The days of profit from victory of one's own side had long gone by. To the big interest it mattered little any longer which side won; their concern now was two-fold, to sift wealth out of the waste of war, and to see that neither side emerged from a conflict dangerously strong. They were upheld, as it were, by a balance of forces ingeniously held in equilibrium; in peace the scales tilted slowly back and forth, in war there was a hurried throwing of weights into this pan and then that to prevent either coming down with a crashing victory. It was good while it lasted, and it had lasted a long time, but of late there had been signs that the central pivot was about to crack as the movements which were to culminate in the Great Union gathered force.

It was a system which had been developed out of the natural conditions of Earth and it had suited the select dwellers in Earth's penthouses very well indeed, but now they saw the foreshadow of a world in which it would no longer work.

From what Machiavellian mind there first crawled the idea that it was possible to improve on Nature even in this respect is unknown; its owner remains unsung, unglorified. But it is clear what he saw. Here was a new world. Into it were beginning to flow colonists from the old. They were of different nationalities, but that was beginning to matter less than it did. They were nearly all of the white race. For the most part they were tough customers more occupied with the business of living than learning; individualists, too, anxious to get on rather than combine, anxious to be lent money to buy machinery and to be put into other men's debt. That was satisfactory. But one day the ideas which were taking hold on Earth would be carried across space and begin to spread on Venus. There would be no racial bar to hold them back and little language difficulty; before long the people would rise as one. They would refuse to be exploited, to be chained down by heavy interest, to put up with low wages and poor conditions—and then the dominant moneyed class would dominate no more.

"They must not unite," said the Machiavellian mind. "They must be divided amongst themselves. And what is the greatest factor of disunion on Earth? It is race. But Nature has not seen fit to create different races of men upon Venus. Very well, then, *we will.*"

Most sedulously unwritten is the history of early Venusian development. How did they set about the creation of colored races? Did they steal children and adopt orphans?

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Did they distrain upon children for non-payment of debts? Did they bully or bribe? Did they drive men and women into actual slavery? Did they set up colonies in remote places? No one knows. No one is ever likely to know, for it was a secret well kept and now deep buried.

It is only remembered that strange men and women, Green, Magenta-Red and Black, began to be seen about. According to rumor they were the offspring of Whites and natives to be found in some secluded parts of Venus. No one had seen these natives, but each had a friend who had. It seemed natural, if scarcely commendable.

Simultaneously began a reduction in the quota of immigration from Earth. The supply of new White blood decreased, but the numbers of colored people appeared to increase. Whites began to marry Green, Red or Black partners, and always the child was the color of its colored parent. It was odd. There was considerable talk about genes, but to little purpose. It seemed that the terrestrial laws and heredity did not hold on Venus.

Later the immigration laws were relaxed to some extent and careful attention paid to the balance of the sexes. It began to become uncustomary to intermarry with the colors. Later still it became not only illegal, but unethical.

By that time, David explained, the four "races" were firmly established.

"But how was it ever allowed to happen?" Leonie wanted to know. "There must have been people who knew, why didn't the doctors stop it?"

"For a very simple reason. Who do you think owned and ran the hospitals? A man could only be a doctor if he kept in with the authorities—and the same is true now. All doctors and hospital attendants are, as you may have noticed, of the White, the ruling, class. Oddly enough they despise the colored for being colored even though they are responsible for it. Even I, if I am honest with myself, do not feel that I am quite the same as a Red or a Green. That's the pressure of mass opinion, of course; against all I know, and against all reason it is there. That's where the truly diabolical nature of the thing lies. Once it was under weigh it had to go on. And what could or can we doctors do? Protest and be struck off the register or perhaps imprisoned for subversive activities? Protest that we will not give a Green woman the Green baby she expects? We cannot even protest that the coloration does any physical harm. It doesn't."

"Except to bring bloodshed and murder."

"That's not supposed to be in the doctor's province."

"But suppose you united and called a strike. Refused to do it any more."

"Well, to begin with, one would probably disappear or be struck off in the attempt to get unity. But even apart from that this thing has gone on so long now that I don't think you would get unity at all. You see, there's another side to it, too.

"Try to imagine yourself a Red woman. You have always been Red,

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so have your family, your friends, your schoolmates. You have married a Red man. All your life you have expected and looked forward to have a Red baby. What is going to happen if someone suddenly shows you a White baby after it is all over and says: 'This is yours'? You are going to disbelieve it, of course. It is somebody else's baby, not yours. No amount of argument is going to kill the doubt in your mind. And what about your husband? He, too, has expected a Red baby. How is he going to take a White one—and what is he going to think? I told you what happened to a Green woman with a White baby. Even if you, a Red woman, were told it all as I have told it to you now and if you did believe it, you would still demand your Red baby, you would be ashamed, afraid to face your world with a White one.

"God, don't you see what we've done? We've built a lie too colossal to be disbelieved."

"And it must go on and on?"

"As long as each color thinks itself the superior of the others—and the Government sees that it does—it must go on. There's only one way that I can see in which it might be stopped and that's by the elimination of the streptococci and other infections. That would make it safe for women to have babies in their own homes, and the whole thing would come down with a run. But until then . . ."

Leonie sat silent, a slight frown on her forehead, her eyes staring unseeing into the misty distance.

"How is it done, Dick, this coloring?"

"Oh, that's not very difficult. After the baby has been washed it is taken along to a special room. There it is smeared all over with a particular grease. Depending on the color of its mother there is a coloring agent, Red, Green or Black latent in the grease. It is then placed under a projector which looks something like an X-ray tube, and is turned very carefully so that every inch of its body comes under the direct rays. They are short waves and carry the color from the grease. They penetrate the skin and beyond, and their action is rather that of burning the special coloring agent right into and through the skin at low temperature. It sounds a little painful put that way, but actually it isn't. The child feels nothing whatever. After that it is ready to be washed again and taken back to its mother. The whole thing takes less than five minutes."

"And the color is there for the rest of its life?"

"Yes. Though as I expect you've noticed, the coloring is rather more vivid in children than in adults."

"David. I can hardly believe it even now. All these Red, Green and Black men and women . . . ?"

"Every one of them, Leonie!"

"Was there ever a lie so big?" Leonie turned suddenly and grasped his arm.

"David," she said, desperately, "David, this musn't, this shan't go on. It's got to be broken. Somehow there must be a way of breaking it. We've got to find it."

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"Hullo, Reynick. Come along in. Have a drink."

The Chief of the Tallor Police, secret and uniformed branches, did as he was bid. He sat down in a comfortable chair half-facing his host and raised his glass.

"Always a harbinger of trouble," said Mr. Wilfred Baisham, amiably. "What is it now?"

Reynick sipped at his drink.

"It's not so much a matter of what is now," he said, "more a case of what may be soon. It's really guidance for the future I'm after. I don't think anything like this has ever shown up before."

"All right, no need to beat about. Guidance on what?"

"On Mr. Ward's daughter."

"What about her?"

"Subversive activities."

"Oh, that. They're all like that, they grow out of it. Most of 'em get interested in some young man and forget about it. She must soon see that Earth ideas aren't wanted here."

"This one seems to be growing into it."

"Give her time."

"I'm inclined to think it's more serious. In the last few months I've been hearing more and more about her. She's been working around a lot among the colored women, telling them they're as good as the Whites, and she seems to have a way with her for I'm told they've been listening a bit." He paused to light a cigar and went on:

"Mind you, I don't say they take her very seriously, and she's certainly not got anything that could be called a following. All the same, one can't pretend that that kind of thing is good. It might conceivably catch on a bit if there were to be a wave of unrest. Another thing, anybody else who feels like that—and there are quite a few of them—and sees her getting away with it feels encouraged to have a shot at it, too. To my mind it's the kind of thing that it pays to nip right in the bud."

"Well, what am I supposed to do about it? After all, nipping things is your job," Mr. Baisham pointed out.

"Certainly, and if it had been anyone else I'd have done it by now. But this isn't so easy. After all, Mr. Ward's daughter. . . ."

"Yes, I see that."

"And it's not only that. If we touch her, either taking her up in court, or —er—less officially, we advertise the whole thing and make it much more important. Of course, we could tip off the news strips to keep it quiet, but these things get around. Besides, what's old man Ward going to say—and do? I can't see him taking it quietly.

"It's darned awkward. She's not like the usual run of Milota charity women—they'll take a hint, she won't."

Mr. Baisham leaned forward and poured himself another drink.

"What you're really getting at, Reynick, is that you want me to have a go at Ward. Show him the error of his daughter's ways?"

"Well, he would take it better from you than from me."

"All right. I'll try if you like. But to be candid, I don't hold out much

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hope. It'll worry him a bit, but it's done that already. Between you and me, Reynick, the girl just doesn't pay any attention to him now. Ungrateful little bit, after all he's done for her and spent on her. Poor chap takes it hard. He's been looking forward to having her home for years now and she treats him like the furniture. However, as I said, I'll mention it. But if I were you I'd think up a second line."

"Such as?"

"Well, if I were in your place I'd let her go on, but keep a careful eye on her. You might even let it be known that you're keeping an eye on her. Meanwhile, you could let a little rumor circulate that she's trying to rouse trouble between, say, the Greens and the Blacks. That may make her draw in a bit, I hope it does. But if she goes on, sometime or other she'll overstep the mark, then your men will have to see to it that she disappears. If it's done neatly everybody will think it's either the Greens or the Blacks who did it—and they can fight that out among themselves. I'd hate you to have to do it for her father's sake as well as her own, she's a live girl and she's got pluck, but all the same, if she shows signs of getting dangerous, she's got to be stopped, no matter who she is."

"Palliam?" asked Reynick.

Wilfred Baisham frowned. Palliam, the penal island, the place of lifelong sentences never remitted. For the daughter of a good friend. It was not nice. But he shook his head regretfully.

"I'm afraid so. There's nowhere else as safe. But try everything else first."

There was a frown on Leonie's face as she shut the front door of a small Chellan house behind her and turned to walk to the spot where she had left her car in the main road. The street she must traverse to reach it was narrow and badly lit, one into which few, if any, of the other dwellers on Milota would have ventured alone by night. But Leonie had little nervousness of Chellan now. Francis Clouster had, she fancied, passed a word around on her behalf, but, more important, she had become a known figure there. It was understood by the Greens that though her ideas might be odd, she meant well.

Meant well. . . . There lay the reason for her frown. That was their faintly damning opinion of her. Try as she would, shape her tactics as she might, she seemed unable to make progress. David had convinced her that her ambition to shout the truth about themselves to the colored peoples would mean not only danger to herself, but disaster to her cause. They would not be told, realization if it could come at all must not be thrust upon them so that they could resist it; it must come or appear to come from inside themselves. By hints, by becoming aware of discrepancies, by linking this and that together they must be led on to question their own state, to ponder its anomalies and arrive at the answer for themselves. She understood now that her part, if it were to be of use at all, must be played with subtlety and the

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utmost caution against a careless word. She must prompt ever so gently, indetectably. Urge and deflect without arousing a breath of suspicion that she was directing.

For months now she had been pursuing this course. Listening sympathetically to gain confidence, speaking little, dropping every now and then a word which should have struck a spark of inquisitive interest, but never seemed to. As far as she could see the months had been utterly wasted. There had been no progress; no Green, Red or Black had taken even the first step which might lead to his one day questioning his Greenness, Redness or Blackness. This evening had been typical of the lack of response. To a party of Green women she had in the natural course of conversation remarked how it had at first surprised her to find that Greens naturally had pink finger nails and toe nails just like her own. She had even been a little obvious, but no one had been much interested or wanted to compare theirs with hers. One could only hope as one had hoped so many times that the suggestion would lie dormant to arise later. Meanwhile she must continue to watch a tongue that was for ever threatening to run way in its impatience.

A trifle disturbing, too, was the realization that if her hints failed to register in the desired quarter, they were getting home somewhere else, with the result that she herself became the recipient of hints referring for the most part to the unpleasant consequences encountered by persons who tried to stir up trouble. She was uncertain at first what value to put upon them, but their frequent recurrence from the most unexpected sources had lately begun to worry her more than a little. It was understandable that while her eyes were on the ground, steering her round the worst mud patches, her mind should be preoccupied.

She was without suspicion as she passed the entrance of a dark alley; taken completely by surprise when a hand from behind clapped down over her mouth and an arm simultaneously whipped round her, fastening her own arms to her sides.

She lashed backward with a heel, bringing a grunt from the man behind her, but no slackening of his grip. A second man, no more than a dark figure in the gloom, dodged forward to catch her ankles and lift her feet from the ground. Without a word the two men turned to carry her back up the alley whence they had come. For a hundred yards or more they stumbled and slid along the uneven paving. Blocking the other end where the alley gave on to a wider road, she could see the shape of a car ready balanced on its two wheels. As they drew closer she could distinguish the faint humming of its gyroscopes. She struggled ineffectively. Held as she was she could do little but bend her knees and kick out again in an attempt to loosen the men's holds. It made them stumble a bit, and the man in front swore in a grumble, but practical result there was none.

They came close beside the car.

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The man who held her feet released his hold with one hand and reached for the door handle. At that moment there was a thud behind her. The hand dropped from her mouth and the arm round her relaxed. She felt herself falling. Simultaneously the man in front looked round. She had a vision of an arm which held something in its hand striking down at his head. He dropped without a murmur. A groping hand found her own arm, and pulled her to her feet.

"Quick and be quiet," breathed an urgent voice.

She was being dragged at a helter-skelter stumbling run back along the alley. Halfway down they swung into another passage-way even darker, and then round corners one after another until all sense of direction was gone, and she felt like a bewildered child in a nightmare, staggering, slipping, panting, but dragged willy-nilly onwards through an endless dark labyrinth.

There came a pause at last. She leaned against a wall, gasping for breath. Her companion was a black shadow in the darkness. She could hear him fumbling in his pockets. She had only one desire; to get back to her car and drive furiously home.

"My car. . . ." she began.

"Damn your car. It's your life you want to save," said a low voice, curtly.

He ceased to fumble. There was a sound of a key in a lock. A hand urged her forward into absolute blackness. The door shut behind them. He took her wrist again, leading her cautiously forward for a dozen yards or more. Then once more he stopped.

"Lie down here," he said. "I don't suppose anyone will come, but if they do, pull the stuff right over you and don't make a sound. Don't breathe. I'm going now to see what's happened. I'll be back in an hour or so."

Bending over, Leonie felt a pile of coarse material like jute under her hand. She heard his footsteps moving away. By the door they paused.

"If you put any value on your life," his voice came softly, "you'll stay here, and be safe."

Leonie found her voice shaky and a little meek.

"I'll stay," she said into the darkness.

She dare not strike a light to look at her watch. If it was only an hour he was away, it was the longest hour of her life, and all through it she lay on the pile of sacking with ears strained for the faintest sound. The tone of urgency in his voice had done more to rouse her apprehensions than the actual events. At the long delayed sound of the lock she started up, sitting; one hand ready to drag the musty cloth over herself.

"It's all right," said the same voice.

She let out her held breath, and put a hand to her thumping heart. He came closer.

"Come along."

He led the way in the dark along passages, through doors and finally down a flight of steps. At the bottom he closed the last door and turned on the light. Leonie blinked and then opened her eyes to find herself facing

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a man whose skin was green as the patina on copper. There was something faintly familiar about him, but it was always difficult to recognize people of the colors, one had to learn to remember faces by form alone without the help of complexions.

"Who are you?" she said.

"Never mind about that. The important point at the moment is that you, Miss Ward, are in a nasty spot."

"Why?"

"I should have thought you could guess that yourself. Weren't you warned that you were heading for trouble?"

"I suppose I was, but. . . ."

"And who do you suppose those men were who grabbed you?"

"I've no idea. It was dark, Greens? I'd just been talking to some Green women."

"You've talked to too many people. Those two were secret police."

"*Secret* police, why I. . . ."

"Yes, secret. It would have been a nice little secret business altogether. Total and inexplicable disappearance of prominent Milota citizen's daughter."

There was a pause. Leonie's gaze wandered round the room. It had the appearance of a rough workshop. There was a bench on one side, a metal surfaced table on the other, racks of tools hung on the walls, a little pile of chips and shavings covered the floor. The only breaks in the four walls were a small ventilator and the door through which they had entered. A cellar, she supposed, taking the place in with only half her mind.

"What would have happened?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It means you're officially listed as dangerous. You're not to be allowed to go about trying to spread disaffection on Venus. They daren't send you to Earth for they won't want your views spread there. I should say it means either imprisonment for life on Palliam or some such place—or perhaps something more drastic."

Leonie looked at him hard. There was no doubt he meant what he said.

"But without hearing — without trial?" she said, incredulously.

"Do you think they want to give you the chance to announce your views in public?"

"Then perhaps I have to thank you for my life?"

"We might see about that later on. The important thing just now is for you to disappear—only in a different way." He laid on the bench a bag which he had been carrying slung from one shoulder. Out of it he pulled a large jar and a bundle of clothes and a dark bottle. He took up the jar and started to loosen the lid.

"The White Miss Ward has got to vanish," he said. "You'll have to become a Green."

Leonie looked up at him, horror-stricken.

"Me, a Green woman. No, oh, no. I can't, I can't look like them."

"And why not?" inquired the Green man, coldly.

"To be a Green the rest of my life, never to see myself as I really am. I couldn't."

"Of course not. There's a medium which will get this stuff off once

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you're safely away from here and out of reach."

"Oh, I see. How silly of me. For a moment I thought you meant I must be made Green like they make the babies."

The Green man stared at her. Slowly he put down the jar on the bench. His eyes never left hers.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"A—er—I—I must have heard it somewhere."

"It's scarcely the kind of thing one hears by accident. Now I begin to understand why they wanted you so much. Tell me, have you been spreading this about? No, of course you haven't or you wouldn't be here now. But just what were you up to?"

"I wanted to make them find it out for themselves."

Surprisingly he laughed.

"What a hope. A few hints and suggestions, I suppose. Did you think those were going to get through the mass of suggestion carefully built up all their lives. Do you know anything of crowd psychology?"

"I thought they might. There didn't seem any other way. And, anyway, it doesn't seem to surprise you. Who are you?"

"Never mind about that now. We must get on. You see the stuff in this jar." He held it so that she was able to make out a dark green substance within. "You must put this on. For a week at least it will make you indistinguishable from any other Green. In the bottle there's dye for your hair. Now get your clothes off, and go to it."

"But. . . ."

"For God's sake. Is this a time for fooling about the proprieties?"

"All right," said Leonie, meekly.

He gathered up her clothes as she shed them and put them into the bag.

"Now put the green stuff on. Do it properly, make yourself a thorough Green woman—we don't want any silly accidents. Give it ten minutes or so to take, and then wash the rest off. There's a tap in the corner. Maybe you'd better do your hair first—and don't forget your eyebrows and eyelashes. Then get dressed in these things," he pointed to the bundle of clothes he had brought, "and wait until I come back."

The door slammed and he was gone, taking her clothes with him.

Leonie set about the business of changing her "race."

He was gone over two hours. When he returned he submitted her to a critical survey. Leonie withstood it awkwardly, conscious of the ill-fitting cheap clothes she wore.

"Well?" she said, after his eye had taken her in from top to toe.

"You'll do. Except for that watch. No Green woman could afford a watch like that. Better give it to me."

She handed it over without protest and he slipped it in his pocket.

"I might have done better with a mirror," she observed.

"I doubt it. You'd most likely have quit altogether."

Leonie gazed at her fantastically green arm, wondered what her face was like, and thought he was probably right.

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"And now?" she asked.

"And now we are going out. You are a Green woman in the Green quarter — your home, don't forget. Miss Leonie Ward is dead—murdered to put it crudely. Somebody who didn't like her took her out to the marshes and fed her to the saurians. Only a few bloodstained rags of her clothing to show what happened. All most regrettable and upsetting, but rather the kind of thing you might expect to happen to a girl who would mix with the colored peoples."

Leonie paused at the door. Something clicked in her memory—"Only a few bloodstained. . . ."

"Now I know who you are. You're Dick Clouster, who's supposed to be dead. I saw you at your father's house once."

"You did. And in one of my less cautious moments. It worried me for a bit afterwards."

"And you're not a real Green after all."

"Who is? Come along now, we must be moving."

Mr. Wilfred Baisham spoke into the telephone.

"My dear friend. They've only just told me. What a ghastly thing to have happened. So young, such a lovely girl with all her life before her. An appalling tragedy."

He listened to a few sentences in Mattington Ward's attenuated voice before he spoke again.

"I? Well, yes, I have a little influence in the Police Department, I suppose, but I shan't need to use it. This thing's made their blood boil. It's an outrage which Tallor is never going to forget. They'll get them. you can depend on that, Mattington. They'll be at it night and day until they find the men that did it. Fiends like that have got to be caught, and caught quickly."

He listened a little longer before he said goodbye and rang off. For a moment he sat and looked absent-mindedly at the misty world beyond the window. Then he picked up the telephone again and dialled a number.

"Hullo, Reynick. Anything about the Ward girl yet?"

"—No? Well, it's a bit soon perhaps. By the way, her father and all Milota's quite satisfied the Greens did it. Not a doubt between them. That'll make things quite simple when you do find her."

"—Yes, I'm pretty sure. The whole thing was too convenient. Why choose just the moment when your men had got her?"

"—Yes, I know people have been put out on the marshes before, but it's always been done in hot blood, with a minor or major riot of some kind to carry it through."

"—Of course you have. You didn't expect her to try to get away in her own car, did you? Now look here, when you do find her, I'd go steady. Don't pounce the moment she's spotted. Lie low a bit. We thought she was on her own, but it's pretty clear now she's not. There may be several under cover. When you make your jump you want to bag the lot if you can. Provided she's here at all, of course. It's not quite at all unlikely that she's been acting as

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agent for a group outside Tallor altogether, in which case, she's probably in another city already. Have you been able to get a line on how much she really knows?"

"—Oh, you think that, do you? Then she's more dangerous than we fancied. Still, she can't do much now she's on the run. By the way, it might do to keep an eye on that young man. . . . Yes, Dr. David Sherrick. . . . Yes, let me know."

Again Wilfred Baisham sat gazing speculatively out of the window. For a quarter of an hour he was lost in thought before he reached once more for the telephone.

"West Milota Hospital? . . . My name's Baisham, I want to speak to the Director if he's free."

"—Hullo, Dray. I'd like a word confidentially with you, it's rather urgent. Mind if I come round right away? . . . Good, I'll be there in ten minutes.

Leonie stared long and miserably into the mirror, studying every detail of the face which stared back. A face with a complexion soft as velvet, but green as grass. The lips, after the manner of most Green women, were painted a brilliant red, they matched the small rings in her ears. There was a faint shading of dusky powder on her eyelids which was also a fashion among Green women. When she opened her mouth her teeth gleamed a startling white: she opened it as little as possible. Her dark hair was now shorter and dressed differently from the way it had been when it was fair. Still she could barely believe in its reality. She put a hand up to touch it, to feel that it was her own face—a green hand with finger nails painted red as her lips.

This was herself. This thing in the mirror. This for ever more, if David failed.

She hid her face in her green hands and wept.

It had been inescapable. Two days after the attack in the alley Dick Clouster had come up to the little room he had found for her. He was carrying a black case which he set down carefully on the table.

"I'm afraid I've bad news for you. There's a comb-out going on in Chellan."

"The Police?" she asked, anxiously.

He nodded.

"Do you think they know I'm here?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. It's quite probably someone else. You're not the only White masquerading as a colored. But that doesn't make it any the less serious."

"But they'll never recognize me like this. I can stand questions. I've learnt that family history you gave me off by heart. I'm Doris Glandon, my father was. . . ."

"I know, but they've got cute little dodges. I told you there was a medium which gets the green stuff off. Well, a little touch from a pad damped with that, and it's all up. They get real Greens to mingle in the street and touch as many hands with it as possible. Or they put it on handles of doors, anything which a lot of people may touch, and set a watch. I've

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even known them to spray it over a crowd in the hope that somebody will look spotty. The real Greens don't mind. It doesn't matter to them."

"Well," she said with a half apprehension of what was coming.

"I'm sorry, Leonie. It means you'll have to stop playing at being a Green, and really become one."

"No—no!"

"There's no other safe way. I wish there were. If you don't, they'll spot you sooner or later. For all I know they may be starting on a house-to-house test right now."

"But—oh, God, I can't do that. I can't."

"Look, I've brought a projector. It's rough, but it works—I know, because I had to use it on myself. We can get it done in ten minutes."

"And for the rest of my life—oh, no."

"Listen. I had to do it. Do you think I liked it? But if I hadn't I should have been caught half a dozen times before this."

"You're not a woman."

"Oh, for heaven's sake! Won't you realize that it is this or your life. Your life! A live Green woman—or a nice pink and white corpse. You choose."

"Don't."

It had taken him the best part of two hours to ram it home to her, to batter down and demolish her stubborn opposition, until she was left weakly and tearfully consenting.

She scarcely recalled its actual accomplishment. Vague memories of being smeared with something, of being turned this way and that beneath a tube which glared and hummed and gradually obliterated the girl who had been Leonie Ward to put Doris Glandon in her place, and of her mind still feebly protesting while her body consented.

Within twenty-four hours the necessity had been proved, and by a more direct method than she expected. There was a barrier across one of the main streets and a party of Green police at its only gap. There was no going back, everyone was ordered to pass through, to press his or her hand on a damp pad and brush it lightly across a sheet of white paper.

"Why do you take so much trouble with me?" she asked Dick Clouster the following evening. "When I look at this," she held out her green hand —"I'm not even grateful. I'm not worth your trouble."

"My father and mother tell me differently," he said, "besides, I think you are in love with David. He was one of my best friends, you know."

"Was! He would be now if he knew you were alive. And I *was* in love with him."

"You're not now?"

"I can't let myself be now—like this."

Dick Clouster had made no reply to that. He had sat for some minutes in silence. When he spoke it was to ask:

"It was David who told you about the coloring of the babies, wasn't it?"

She nodded.

"Why?" he asked. "He broke his professional word. He must have had some good reason."

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"Because he knew how I felt about this—this slavery of the colors. He knew that I meant to go on working against it though he warned me—he told me what happened to you, or, rather, what he thought happened to you, as a warning. And I would not take that warning."

"Do you wish you had?"

"I don't think I could have done. I should have gone on feeling as I did and it would have shown sooner or later. Anyway, when I didn't, he knew that I should be bound to have to know about the babies sooner or later, so he told me."

"And David himself. How does he see it?"

"He says he's ready to use his life to stop it. But that any course he can see would lead only to his wasting his life without stopping it. And I understand that now," she added, bitterly.

Dick got up and began to pace the room. Her gaze followed him back and forth. Suddenly he turned on her.

"Will you swear this? Swear by everything most sacred to you that is how he really feels?"

"I'd put my life on it."

His eyes held hers, intense and penetrating. He nodded. "I believe you." He sat down again. In a calmer tone he went on. "Then there may be a chance. Now listen, I'm going to tell you something which very few people know.

"Very many years ago an accident happened up at one of the Milota hospitals. By some mistake the child of a white woman there was taken to the coloring room. He emerged Black, indelibly Black.

"It was a disaster for the family. Their only son, and there were reasons why they could expect no more children. The mother nearly went out of her mind, the father was distracted, the child was taken home and hidden away out of sight. The father was an exceedingly rich man. If anything could be done about it, he determined to do it—at any cost. In the face of tremendous Governmental opposition he built a research laboratory, equipped it, financed it and brought experts to work in it. The prize he offered to the man who could perfect a system of harmless decoloring was fabulous.

"For over ten years he poured money into what appeared to be a hopeless quest, and then, suddenly, it seemed, it was found.

"The boy was treated and emerged a normal White.

"The Government swooped like lightning and seized the machine, but neither the father nor the inventor minded that much: the one had his son; the other, a fortune.

"The fate of the machine hung in the balance a while. A considerable body of officials was for its complete destruction; another body felt that a mistake which could happen once could happen again. In the end six machines were made, again in the face of strong opposition. They were deposited in the charge of the directors of the six largest hospitals on Venus, for use only in the gravest emergencies.

"One of them is in the West Milota Hospital."

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"Where David is," murmured Leonie.

"For years," Dick went on, "I've been haunted by the thought of that machine locked uselessly away. I've never seen it, but I've been told about it. It's a projector, not unlike the one which does the staining to look at, but it almost exactly reverses the process. A jelly is applied to the skin, the rays of the projector pass through it and the skin and break down the pigments into their components and by some ductile effect of the special jelly they are drawn out and held. It may take three or even four applications and treatments to clear every trace of the pigmentation, but it does it.

"Yes, for years I've wondered how one could get hold of that machine. I've been a Green long enough to know some other Greens who would undergo the experiment if I had the machine. But there had to be someone at the other end, someone whom I knew I could trust to risk his life for it."

"David's been there a long time. Couldn't you have. . . ."

"Yes, I know. But he was younger when I knew him. I thought of him more than once, but I could never make up my mind to get into touch with him. You see, one's got to be certain, certain beyond all shadow of doubt. And it must be successful. It's not just our lives, yours, mine and his, that hang on it. It's the fate of all the colored people. I was afraid to make a move because I'm as sure as I am of anything that at a bungled attempt the Government would fly into a panic and destroy all six machines at once; they'd take no second chance.

"Now, I'm going to risk it at last. I'm going to stake everything on David. I can tell him where it is and how it is protected; the rest will be up to him. If he'll do it."

"I think he'll do it. I know he will."

"We must get into touch with him. That'll have to be done carefully. Unless they're perfectly satisfied about you they'll be watching him. Probably they will anyway, because he was associated with a subversive person such as you. Yes, he'll have to be warned about that right at the beginning. . . ."

Hope revived in Leonie, but it was a much tempered hope. There would be so much risk, so many things to go wrong, so much strife to be faced later on. And would the colored people believe even the evidence of their own eyes? Wouldn't they even then be likely to think that they had been changed by a trick into Whites, rather than see that they had been restored to their natural state? But perhaps that did not matter overmuch. They would learn in time. Success would mean something like civil war, more fighting and bloodshed. Treatment of a few of each color done secretly would convince their friends and relatives. The desire to be a White, one of the ruling class, would spread like fire. But the power of the Government must be overthrown before they

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could settle down undisturbed to liberating the thousands, herself among them, from the bondage of their colors.

If David were to fail—well, thousands would never know. But she would. For the rest of her life a green face would look back at her from her mirror.

And David had come. Circuitously and, he believed, unobserved. He had been watched the last few days, he knew that, and he had taken elaborately particular pains to see that his followers were thrown off.

She had been at the meeting place, a mean cottage on the outskirts of Chellan when he had arrived. He had walked into the room, his eyes had rested on her a second remotely, uninterestedly.

She had had to step forward and say:

"David!"

There had been a moment's distaste in his eyes. A fraction of a second before his ear recognized her voice. She saw the realization come home to him, surprise, concern and something less pleasant than concern passing across his face.

"Leonie! Leonie, darling."

He opened his arms to her. She went to them and they closed round her.

"Leonie, dear."

Everything should have been the same. . . .

Then Dick had come in to talk, advise and explain half through the night. And David had agreed as she had never doubted he would. Between the three of them they had plotted and planned down to the last detail. They had parted tired out, but buoyed up with a new hope. If it could be done at all, Leonie felt, David would do it.

But, oh, that look for a Green woman.

And so, Leonie wept.

Dick Clouster was on his feet expounding and exhorting. Leonie looked at the faces before him. They reminded her of a crowd listening to the patter of a quack medicine man. Hope, frank disbelief, satirical amusement, they were all there. Occasionally their eyes shifted to the apparatus which David was erecting on a table in the corner, and then came back to the speaker's face. They listened, but without conviction.

There were over thirty of them in the room, men and a few women, all Greens. There had been an argument over that, but Leonie's view that there ought to be representatives of all three colors had been borne down by the two men. For one thing there were few contacts with the Red and Blacks: it would not be easy to approach any and persuade them to come; and if they did come Dick and David were apprehensive of the results. It was notoriously difficult to handle successfully any meeting, even a small one, where the colors were mixed. Finally it was decided to introduce the machine to each group in turn, and to the Greens first because it was simplest for Dick, as a Green, to collect a group of them.

Leonie looked across at David. His face wore a serious intent expression

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as he bent over his work, assembling, adjusting and connecting. It was a month since the night he had come to Chellan. She had not seen him since then, it had been safer for him to seem to go on as usual and only to communicate with them if it were vitally necessary. During that time he had had to work on his own. To make certain the machine was still kept where Dick said it was; to put out of action the locks and alarms which secured it; to get it away; and finally, to cover every trace of his tampering.

She lifted her hand and looked at its green back. Soon that would be green no more. Once the organization of the Whites was overthrown and the peril of their police removed, she would be free to put herself under the machine and become white once more.

David turned and beckoned her. She crossed over to help him erect and screw down the plated pillar which would suspend the machine over the table. In a few minutes now there would be a form lying on that table, losing forever the affliction of its color. It made the sight of her green hands working close to David's white ones easier to bear.

Dick was coming to his peroration now. Showing his audience what it meant. Not just change of color for a few individuals, but revolution; the liberation of all the colors. For a moment that sentiment did not seem to appeal. Clearly there was a section which felt that if it could be done it should apply only to themselves, the Greens. How would it be possible to avoid contamination by the vicious Reds and the sordid Blacks if they were indistinguishable from other people? Wisely Dick sensed the feeling and dropped that aspect. For some minutes he concentrated on the injustices suffered by the Greens themselves; the contrast between their way of living and that of the Whites on Milota.

Finally he asked:

"Which one of you is going to be the first to regain his birthright color? I could show you on myself how it can be done, but you might think I had tricked you. I want one of you whose family is known, whose parents and grandparents are known to everyone as Greens. Who?

There was a pause, a dead silence. Then one of the women moved uncertainly forward. A dozen voices muttered a name, it was evident that she was known. She came slowly down the room breathing a little fast between brilliant red lips, red earrings aswing beside a face gravely beautiful in its lines, non-human in its color.

Dick looked swiftly round the rest, his expression challenging an objection. There was none. He took her by the hand and led her towards the table.

"Your arm first," he said. "That will be enough proof."

He rolled up her sleeve and began to apply a jelly-like stuff to her hand and forearm. David connected up his apparatus and snapped a switch on and off to assure himself that it was in working order. Leonie stepped back, watching the woman's face, wondering how she felt, and remem-

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bering her own experience of the reverse process. Over the whole watching room was drawn a tension that could be felt, as if at long last they had begun to understand what it meant.

Dick put the woman's arm in position beneath the projector.

"You must turn it over, very slowly, when I tell you," he instructed.

She did not seem to hear. She was looking down at it. Long, slim green fingers, beautifully shaped red nails. Leonie, the whole room, felt her hesitate and then finally make up her mind.

Dick stepped back. David put up one hand to steady the projector, his other on the switch.

"And now to smash this lie forever," he murmured.

The switch clicked in a breathless silence.

For a second nothing moved. Then with a scream of agony the Green woman tore her arm from beneath the projector.

Simultaneously the door across the room cracked and broke inwards.

The telephone bell rang. Mr. Wilfred Baisham turned over in bed and lifted the receiver.

"Oh, hullo Reynick. I've been expecting to hear from you. What happened? Was I right?"

The Police Chief's voice sounded thin and distant at his ear.

"You were. We had a Green there as an observer. As it happens I'm glad I took your advice to let it go through. But it was cutting it pretty fine, you know, they actually started the machine working."

"My dear, Reynick, don't be absurd. It *looked* like the machine, I grant you—it was meant to. Well, what happened then?"

"Oh, I see now. That's why you advised taking no action unless absolutely necessary. You might have told me before and saved me a nasty few minutes."

"It seemed best to tell only the essential people. And it's always best to let a thing like this break itself up without outside interference. Have you pulled in those three? They're the only important ones."

"No, we ——"

"They went for them, did they, when they found it didn't work? I thought they might."

"No. As a matter of fact they didn't. We were in the next room waiting for a signal from our observer—he, incidentally, doesn't believe a word of what Clouster said. He thinks it was going to be some complicated kind of racket and so do the rest of the Greens who were there, at least those who got out do. Well, as I said, we were waiting and wondering and then suddenly there was a God-awful scream from a woman and a riot broke out."

"I thought you said——"

"I did. It wasn't the Greens. It was a gang of Reds. They'd got wind of the business somehow. As they saw it, the Greens had got hold of a dodge for making themselves look like Whites, and the Reds didn't intend to let them have a monopoly—in fact, were out to grab it for themselves. In about three minutes there was a

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full-sized race riot spreading half over the district."

"Tactically that was handy."

"It was. We appeared only as restorers of the peace. I——By the way, you didn't tip off those Reds, did you?" Reynick sounded suspicious.

"No, I'm afraid that was a subtlety which never occurred to me. What happened to the leaders?"

"Clouster and Sherrick got knifed, both of them—and fifteen or sixteen others, too."

"And Leonie Ward?"

"Lynched—poor kid."

Wilfred Baisham paused.

"Nasty. Was it quick?"

"I think so."

Mr. Baisham considered for a moment.

"Perhaps it was better so. A little sooner, that's all. She was too dangerous, that girl. Why must a girl with nerve like that get on the wrong side?"

"To her it was the right side, I suppose."

"I suppose so. All the same, I'm sorry."

And, indeed, it was sorrow Mr. Baisham felt as he put down the receiver. But that did not prevent him sleeping more peacefully than he had slept for some nights past.

THE END

THE TATTLETALE ATOM

By ROBERT N. WEBSTER

POSSIBLY the greatest and most carefully guarded secret of any government in the world is the date of an atom bomb test. And possibly the most impossible secret to keep! Those darn atoms squeal louder than a stuck pig.

If you're interested, the daily newspapers will record its tattling with great fidelity. First, bingo goes the atom bomb. If it's a land test, poof goes the cloud of dust into the stratosphere. If it's an underwater test, whoosh goes the salt particle laden vapor cloud into the upper air. What's the result? Well, the prime requisite of rain is that little dust or salt particle, so microscopically fine that it would float forever in the air if not precipitated by the droplet of water that forms around it. These particles are the catalyst that starts water vapor on its way toward rainfall. So, when the bomb goes off, the rain starts to fall. But HOW it falls! always in violent torrents, cloudbursts, flash floods. Your newspaper will tell you of them. Thousands of them, all over the world, and those in populated areas cause huge financial loss and loss of life. That's sign number one.

Sign number two is temperature. Again the newspapers tell of a significant 40 degree drop in a few short hours all over the world. Not just a local affair. Somehow, the atomic burst disturbs the balance between the lower air and the strato air. The strato cold layer drops several miles and to balance, heated lower areas burst it upward several miles. The result is huge sweeps of cold air. It takes six weeks to restore a normal temperature balance.

Sign three: earthquakes. Directly opposite the bomb burst.

There are several other signs, but none you could observe yourself. Meanwhile we wonder what would happen if a hundred bombs went off together?

Yes, the atom is a tattletale!

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OUT OF TOMORROW

By VIVIAN SHIRLEY

Thoughts are things, the first element that goes into any material object—such as that coveted thing, a thousand-dollar bill. You might make it real, if you thought hard . . .

"IF I were caught—" Leora Smith thought desperately, holding the forbidden book in her lap and looking around. Her mother, after a restless night, was now asleep. Ellie, her little daughter, was safely at school. It was an innocent scene, she told herself, with toast in the toaster, her cup of coffee poured and a magazine to pull over the book if anyone came to the door.

Hope leaped in her as she opened the pages of the book: *Psychosemantics, A Technique*. She pushed back the little curls on her forehead and read on. This was powerful stuff.

"The substance you see with your physical eyes, the material of your dwelling, the landscape, the trees, flowers, the machines you use, your clothing, indeed your body itself, all these so-called material objects are neither objects nor substance in the realm of psychosemantics. They are but subjective states of that phenomenon known as the human mind, delineations of thought patterns in the material realm."

There was the sound of a small truck on the driveway and the opening of the porch door. Leora covered the book quickly with the magazine. The man who delivered bread and milk came in and deposited a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk on the table.

"Good morning, Mrs. Smith," he said, his glance flicking the magazine. "Do you have any money for me today?"

Troubled lines creased her forehead. "No, I don't, but I expect to have it soon."

His face clouded. "I've got to have it. It puts me behind-in my accounts. I get a bawling out and I miss my bonus."

"I am sorry."

"But you could get it," he insisted. "All you have to do is apply to the government. You're entitled to subsistence credits for yourself and your mother and the kid. You'd get extra credits too because you're the widow of a veteran."

"I know."

"Well, why don't you?" He was eager now. "It would make everything easy. Everybody's doing it. No-

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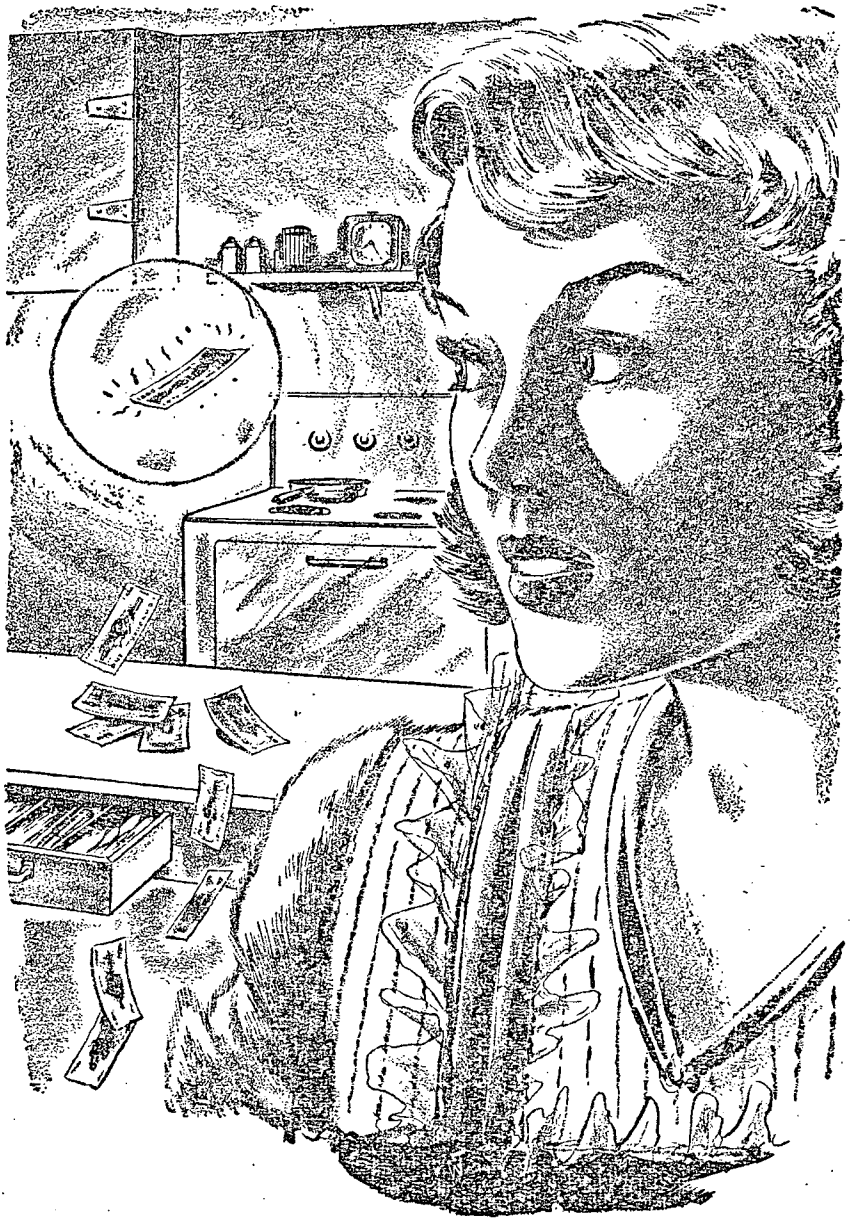

Illustration by Bill Terry

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body can make a living on his own these days."

She looked up at him. She would have liked to explain about this business of government credits but she knew he wouldn't understand if she told him she could not accept a voluntary slavery. Only so long as she could stay financially independent of the government could she maintain what little freedom was left to her. And she needed it all if she was to continue her work with others in the attempt to regain the lost liberties of her land. Each day the security police grew bolder; each day each citizen became more of a number in a big book, a robot who did what he was told to do, bought by a loaf of bread.

She wanted to stand up with flashing eyes and cry out: "Why won't you see? The government is growing into a pagan goddess with a thousand flowing teats. I don't want this; I want to be weaned. I want to be master of my own life, make my own decisions, stand or fall by them. I want to be free!"

But she could not say this to the man; not in 1955. He would feel constrained to report her. She would be accused of treason and disappear, into a labor camp no doubt. Ellie would be sent to an orphanage, and her mother! . . . Heaven alone knew what would happen to her "rugged individualist" mother . . .

The bread-and-milk man made a shuffling noise with his feet. Leora came back to the present sharply.

"I am expecting some money. I am sure to have it soon."

"You said that last week," he grumbled.

She looked at him and smiled wistfully while her mind went busily to work.

This, she thought, is a critical moment in which I must apply my knowledge of psycho-semantics. This situation is merely a delineation of thought patterns in the realm of the material which I have projected possibly through fear and tension. But I am master of the situation. In a land of plenty poverty has to be an illusion of the purely bodily senses. . .

He turned abruptly toward the door. "Well, I'll give you one more week." The door slammed behind him.

The kitchen seemed suddenly unbearably hot, the effect of her tension, no doubt, and also—she glanced upward at the ceiling at the glistening tube of light. This new kind of current used only one per cent of the power the old-fashioned electric lights had consumed, but it also appeared to have other qualities. She sensed a strange rapport between the new type of light and her own concentrated thought as if some new type of force field were being set up with her thinking providing one pole, and the new light the other. She thought back to a course of electronics she had taken in her college days and resolved to try some experiments with the new light when she had more time.

The light, she noticed, glowed with a greater intensity when her thoughts were concentrated.

"It gives such cheap power," she reflected, "it was certainly worth the

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money it cost to have it installed." Then she sighed remembering that she had not yet completely paid for the installation. There were so many debts she owed, and this had come upon her suddenly when her means of paying had seemed to shut up inexplicably.

The fiction editors were no longer buying her stories. She had a letter from an editor who had bought many of them in the past.

"My dear Leora," he had written. "Aren't you letting yourself get out of step with the times? This story is positively atavistic. Your hero is glorying in his own ability and his personal initiative. Don't you realize that is aggressive behavior?"

Even the trade journals were not using her little five-hundred-word articles which had formerly paid for her bread and butter. She had even advertised for typing to do at home, but almost all the answers to her ad suggested that she take a civil service examination for the position of government typist, or had offered to prepare her for such an examination.

Of course there was little private business any more and that which still existed was under such close government supervision that it provided few opportunities for employment. She could go to a farm camp as they called the collective farms, or she could qualify as a teacher in the public schools; she had two college degrees and would get preferment because her husband, Martin, had been a veteran who had died from injuries received in the war. But she shook her head; she had friends who were teachers under the present system and their position was almost unbearable.

They were spied upon continuously; their class room conversations were transcribed on wire tape and the most innocent discussions could sound treasonable to a suspicious and not too intelligent government investigator.

Most of the teachers cracked up in three or four years. Then they went to the state hospital where they had shock treatment.

After several nervous breakdowns and consequent treatment they moved around like zombies and were quietly content to teach by rote. Leora shuddered.

It was not as if the growing terror were tangible. There were no outward scenes of brutality nor horror. No one was marched through the streets behind a firing squad. Only this steadily growing pressure to go into government service, to obey the rules of the manual in use at the time in any field, not to work too hard nor too earnestly, never to make a suggestion or argue a point; the official higher-up always knew best.

As for those poor devils who passed the scrutiny of the government board, who were allowed to study the sciences, who became scientists, rumor had it that they became practical prisoners for the rest of their lives, in the closely supervised government universities or the vast laboratories of the Federal atomic plants.

Leora got up from her kitchen table and locked the outside door, locked it

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on the growing menace. The forbidden book she had been studying seemed to her fevered mind to offer possibilities for coping with the situation. If present-appearing objects were the creation of thought-patterns, as the book claimed, then why would not the reverse be true; why could she not create objects by proper thought patterns?

What I need right now, she said slowly, is a thousand dollars. Let me see: it would be easier to concentrate on one bill, a thousand-dollar bill. These bills, already in existence, are only the subjective states of the human mind. Therefore I, by concentrating on the desired effect, and by knowing that I am complete master of my thought patterns, can materialize a thousand-dollar bill which will then appear within this force field which I set up.

The kitchen was still, a breathless stillness. The light tube grew paler a moment, as if Leora had drawn on it for power, then began to snap and crackle. Suddenly before her eyes, about three feet above the table, there was a quivering as of heat rays on a sunny day and the gradual coalescing of a small sphere. Leora watching held her thoughts steady; almost she imagined she saw the end of a telescope-like object in the sphere which in turn seemed to flow into a kind of misty funnel. A greenish piece of paper came into view and slid down it, into the air above the table, floating and turning, only to be followed by another and another and another. . . Suddenly there was a peculiar sound, something like a sharp slap and an exclamation; the misty sphere suddenly exploded in a flash of light.

"For heaven's sake," Leora heard herself saying when she could speak again. She looked up at the tube to see if it had broken. It looked the same. A horrid doubt of her own sanity crept into her mind but there on the table in front of her, in her lap, on the floor, were the greenish slips.

She bent unsteadily to pick one up: One thousand dollars, read the inscriptions. A thousand-dollar bill. And there were lots of them.

She turned the bill over in her hand. She wanted to laugh, to cry, to shout. But she did none of these things. Instead, she walked into the next room and looked into the mirror to see if she had changed. But no, it was still she, Leora Henry Smith, blue-eyed, brown-haired, 35 and looking younger, she thought. She pinched herself.

"Ouch," she said.

She went back and picked up all the bills and counted them; twelve—twelve-thousand dollars and all hers.

Now that she had them, she wondered what she would do with them. She could hardly give the bread-and-milk man a thousand-dollar bill.

After some meditation she decided on her course of action; if she deposited the money in her own bank, a private one but one under government supervision, she would have to fill out regulation forms as to how she had obtained the money. But if she left her small village and went to New York, forty miles away, she could then withdraw the money in the form

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of credits. And since the government was encouraging the people to take their money out of the private banks and deposit it with the government, her action would not arouse suspicion. She had heard, in fact, that deposits with government banks were even entered as credit marks on the security records of the citizens.

And with what she knew of government efficiency, it would probably take the government bank at least five years to get around to checking up her statements with her own bank.

In five years she would certainly have time to work out an answer to her problem with the loyal underground especially if she did not deposit too much of the money at one time. . . .

She prepared to go into the city, taking one bill with her and hiding the rest in the forbidden book.

In the year 2561, first month, Professor Afgol Convin cuffed Junior a resounding whack, not so much by way of punishment as for emphasis.

"Haven't I told you not to play with the telekinetoscope?" he said severely. "I had it focussed on the twentieth century. There's no telling what contaminating thing you might have transported back here or what damage you might have done there with some careless teleportation of matter."

"Don't be too hard on him, Afgol," said Mada, his wife and co-worker. "There's not much chance anything would have happened. After all, the machine won't work without a force field anchored in the definitive thought-pattern of a disciplined human mind and backed up with enough power. Of course they did have the power in those days, it's true, but disciplined human minds! That's hardly likely. Everyone knows that the twentieth century was the nadir of the Dark Ages!"

THE END

THE FLYING SAUCERS GROW UP

OTHER WORLDS has learned that Henry Holt and Company has published a book (out September 8, 1950) called *Behind The Flying Saucers* by Frank Scully. In it is the complete story of the flying saucer which landed in Mexico with little men aboard. If the book tells the truth, and we have no reason to suppose it does not, it reveals that scientific research has been set back 500 years (in re visitors from space and their inventions as found on the ship) by the most asinine, stupid and officious army snafu in history. So badly was the ship and its contents fouled up that any tangible results to our scientists have been irreparably lost. Says scientist "Gee:" "All I know is they ruined our chances of working on 'live' models and have left themselves groping and guessing ever since."

A space ship intact, its occupants dead, its gadgets intact, and it is lost to us! Remind us to boil with rage at sight of an army uniform from now on! Where do they get off—and *when?*

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EVEN STEVEN . . .

By CHARLES HARNESS

James Goddard was marooned in the worst hellhole on Venus for two more years; but then he saved the life of a man named Steven — who made things even by dropping a stone where it would do most good.

JAMES GODDARD, Botanist, Venus Colonial Commission, nosed his ship carefully through a mass of giant lufa bulbs and made a quick survey of the dense and lofty growth floating a mile above Venus in the steaming air about him. The jets were making very little smoke, and so far he was undetected.

He turned his attention again to the swarm of bird people wheeling and dipping a thousand yards ahead. He was still too far away to identify the object of their excitement, but as he drew closer their shrill cries penetrated the ship cabin and made his heart beat faster.

He wet his lips uneasily. It was the last day in the month and the freighter was due with that precious mail pouch. He didn't want to get involved in anything dangerous before he had a chance to spend a few hours with his mail — before he could renew that rare and vital contact with his wife and son. After that he would risk his life with equanimity.

Maybe it was a false alarm, nothing to get excited about . . .

His ship moved a little faster. Possibly they had caught a porpon, that fleet but defenseless tidbit of the floating forests. Perhaps two or more of their own kind were fighting. It needn't necessarily be—

But it *was* a man. Goddard realized this as soon as he saw the three-hundred foot llana swinging from a lufa island that floated high overhead. At the end of it would be a man, or what was left of one, depending on how far the feathered devils had got with their little preprandial ceremony. The pendulum was not swinging in a very wide arc. Either they had just begun, or it was nearly all over.

Goddard thought one last thought of bulging mail pouches and gently cursed the day he was born.

His foot crammed into the accelerator. As the little ship gathered speed, he drew his Farmann from its holster and put crosshairs on the llana. The red bird things saw the ship when it was three hundred yards away. Some darted to intercept him, screaming at the top of their lungs, while the remainder moved to cut down and rush away with their prize.

Goddard simultaneously pressed

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Illustration by Bill Terry

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the firing button and ducked a shower of shattered plastic as a stony beak stabbed through the cabin nacelle. He twisted the Farmann around with awkward swiftness and fired twice. The creature screamed and flopped over the side of the ship.

He peered anxiously over the bow toward the llana: it was still swinging, but the bird people had almost severed the tough fibers. Again the Farmann coughed, and this time he hit the cord.

The human pendulum dropped toward Venus, a mile below, pursued by shrieking feathered furies. Goddard swallowed rapidly several times as his ship dived in pursuit, crashing headlong through island after island. Somewhere along the insane descent he lost his pursuers and overtook his plummeting human quarry. As hurtling ship and hurtling man drew parallel, Goddard got a brief glance of a shredded Colonial uniform, and a moment later, when a brilliant shaft of sunlight flashed on a bloody face, stricken eyes sizzled into his.

During the last thousand feet, free at last of lufa growth, Goddard rolled back the shambles of the nacelle and swept up the falling body.

The guest surveyed his face wryly in Goddard's shaving mirror. "Unfeeling beggars, aren't they," he said, touching the bandages gingerly. "All one piece, though, thanks to you. I'm Steven, geologist, sector 819."

"Goddard, botanist, 818. Yes, you seem to be in pretty good shape. Those cuts will soon heal." He stared at the other with interest. The red hair pushing up from the be-swathed face reminded him of some giant Venusian vegetable. "Wandering somewhat afield, weren't you?" he asked with good-natured curiosity.

"A little. But maybe it's excusable. My secret passion is pitchblende. The Assistant Commissioner has turned four hundred of us loose in 819 to look for it." His mouth curled humorously. "He even ordered us to carry samples so we'd always know what we were looking for."

Goddard smiled. "That's the A. C., all right."

Steven pulled a couple of inky stones from his pocket. They gleamed dully in the subdued light of the hut. One looked like a black arrowhead.

"The boys place great store by their pitchblende samples," he continued. "We might accidentally walk down the Post street without our britches, but we're never without our samples. Point of honor."

Goddard chuckled silently and handed Steven a glass of tonga, which the latter drained at a gulp.

Goddard refilled the glass. "I thought pitchblende was igneous," he said.

Steven looked at his host with new respect. "It is. And 819 is pure sedimentary. It's like looking for diamonds in a coal bed." He sighed. "Sometimes the field crews say things about the Assistant Commissioner that border on the uncomplimentary."

He went on more seriously: "We really think the stuff is in your sector. You have pegmatites popping out

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all over the place. We sneak over here every chance we get. I was looking over the massif a few miles up the ridge when your red angels spotted me." He looked around the hut. "Say, don't you botanists travel in trios? Anybody else with you on this assignment?"

Goddard studied his liquor for a long time. "I was placed in charge of 818 four years ago," he said slowly, as though trying to remember. "In the first year I lost seven assistants in rapid succession, three to swamp fever, two to the bird people, and two unaccounted for. I think they deserted, but I don't hold it against them. I've handled the station alone, ever since."

"Four years . . . " breathed Steven. "Great Venusian frogbats!" He put his glass down and took the bottle from his host's unresisting hand. "Don't you get lonesome?"

"What do you think? I have a wife and son living in Philadelphia. I don't suppose I'll see them until my enlistment expires. That'll be two more years. Of course, the freighter comes in once a month with the mail and picks up specimens. But that's all."

"Why don't you ask for a transfer to a Class I Post? You'd have family accommodations and could send for your wife and son."

"That was the original understanding with the Assistant Commissioner. But now he says I can't be spared from here until I get a replacement. And nobody has volunteered since the first year. But let's talk of more cheerful subjects. What's it like in 819?"

Steven swished the bottle around and looked embarrassed. "We get preferential treatment, of course, since we're looking for fissionables. We have a Class I, with the lufas cut away for miles around, swamps drained, and so on. There's a school, a church, a theatre . . . the works."

"Sounds wonderful," said Goddard wistfully.

Steven pulled the arrowhead of pitchblende from his pocket again and peered at it. "This freighter," he said, "when is it due?"

"In a couple of hours. But you don't have to go. Stick around; rest up a month or so. Maybe you're in no condition to travel."

Steven laughed. "Sorry, old man. I've got to get back." His brow creased as he studied the piece of pitchblende again. Then he looked through the window out into the clearing. "Is all that stuff going into the freighter?"

"That's the cargo. Some of the specimens are awfully messy, like that one in the pot. Maybe you'd better wait until next month."

"Hmm. That's what you call a 'raining thing,' isn't it? Fairly common in these parts, I believe. They won't bother me. I'll be glad to keep them company. Incidentally, do you happen to remember just where you dug up that particular one?"

"No. Why?"

"I was merely wondering. He tossed the little black stone into the air and caught it. "Anything I can do for you, outside?"

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"Not much, I guess. You might tell the fellows to drop around once in a while. I've got a deck of cards, and remember, the tonga is four years old."

"Old chap, I'll do that. In fact, I'm going to extend an extra-choice invitation, and I have a hunch it's going to bring you some visitors — all sorts of extra-choice visitors."

Steven stuck the bit of pitchblende back in his pocket and upended the bottle. It seemed to the puzzled botanist that the man's few visible freckles were dancing.

Then a big plump thing swept down at them from the skies.

"Hey! Here's the freighter!" cried Steven. "I'll help you carry these things out. Let me take the rain bush!"

The geologist seemed greatly amused at something. He was still chuckling when he waved goodbye to Goddard from the freighter porthole.

Goddard stood there for several moments, mystified, the mail bag clutched in his hand unopened, until the big ship disappeared over the high edge of the lufa.

One morning a week later he looked out of his greenhouse and saw a pompous shape burst from a sleek Commission coupe and run up to the hut.

"Goddard! Goddard!" shouted the visitor, whom he recognized immediately as the Assistant Commissioner.

Goddard washed his hands quickly and ran through his garden to greet the man.

"Ha! There you are, Goddard! All right, where did you get that monkey bush?"

Goddard's jaw dropped. "Monkey bush?"

The Assistant Commissioner led the way into the hut. "Now try hard, Goddard," he pleaded. "I didn't jet three thousand miles to this forsaken hole just to get a blank stare from a second-rate botanist. You've got to remember where you got that damn orangutang!"

"Oh," said Goddard, with sudden comprehension. "You mean raining thing. Why, they grow all over the place. I don't keep a record of location unless the plant is quite rare. I guess you finally read my recommendation for growing them in the Sahara. The leaves are deliquescent and drip water constantly. We can — "

"Forget the plant!" howled the Assistant Commissioner. "It's the *soil* the Commission is interested in!"

"Soil? You mean around the roots? It's just plain dirt, dug up along with the plant," said Goddard, genuinely puzzled. "Just where, I can't — "

"No, Goddard!" cried the Assistant Commissioner, dropping into the only chair. "No, don't interrupt me. You listen a minute." His voice sank to a significant whisper. "Ever since we found a high concentration of thorium in *ruhk* weed we've maintained a Geiger-Muller check on everything, animate or otherwise, leaving the planet for our Chicago laboratories.

"That's how we found *this*" — he tossed Goddard a small object — "in the sod of your chimpansy bush."

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It was an inky little stone, somewhat resembling an arrowhead.

"You wouldn't know it," said the Assistant Commissioner, "but that's pitchblende!"

"No!" said Goddard faintly.

"Yes!" The Assistant Commissioner got up from the chair and began pacing the floor. "It's most unfortunate you don't know where you dug up your tree, Goddard. Very inefficient method of handling your specimens. It means I'll have to order a general reconnaissance. I'm transferring the 819 group over here, and you can look for the construction squad in a few days. Maybe you can recommend some high ground where they can put a Class I Post?"

Goddard managed a nod from where the wall was holding him up.

"You can keep that pitchblende sample as a reminder to be sharper in the future," said the Assistant Commissioner. "And another thing, Goddard. I want the closest integration between your department and these geologists. I don't want to have to do *all* the thinking on this planet." He smiled ingratiatingly and extended his hand. "No hard feelings?"

Goddard may have hesitated the barest fraction of a second. Then he grasped the outstretched hand with vigor and sincerity. "Sir, you may inform the Commission that 818 and 819 are cooperating on a level they wouldn't believe possible!"

"Not yet, of course, Goddard, but your spirit augurs well for the future. And I think your family will like it here when we get the place cleaned up."

The botanist stood in the doorway long after the visiting jet was airborne. A warm euphoria stole over him as he began to visualize floor plans for his future cottage. He wondered whether he'd train his son as a botanist, after all. The mineral sciences might be worth investigating. Great fellows, those geologists. No stone in *their* hearts. . . .

THE END

COMING IN THE JANUARY ISSUE . . . *On Sale Dec. 15*

SKELETON KEY *by William C. Bailey.* Earth's conquerors had one weakness—a fondness for beer.

ROBOT ROMANCE *by Hodge Winsell.* Archie the lisping robot discovers love.

STORM IN A TEACUP *by William F. Temple.* Ever wonder what the first Martian visitor will be like?

Also stories by *Theodore Sturgeon, A. R. Steber, Stanley Mullen* and *Mack Reynolds.*

Watch for your January issue of OTHER WORLDS!

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JOHNNY GOODTURN

By CHARLES R. TANNER

They had done what good scouts never did—they had been disobedient. And now they believed they were being punishd for it...

I AM bothered by a dream.

It is one of those consecutive dreams, or maybe they call them repetitive dreams; anyway, it's one of the kind of dreams that you dream over and over again, each time a little different. I only started to worry about it a week or two ago, but I'm worrying more and more as the days go by.

And it's such an inconsequential sort of a dream, too. Nothing frightening about it at all. I see a boy scout, sitting on a rock and telling me a story. That's all there is to it, a boy in a scout's cap and neckerchief, sitting on a rock and telling a story.

When I first dreamed this dream, it didn't make much sense, for it seemed that I had come in late, that the story was already half over when the dream commenced. And I woke up before the story was finished. But when I dreamed the dream again, a few days later, this young fellow was telling a different part of the same story. And gradually, over a period of several weeks, I have managed to piece the whole story together.

That is why I am worrying. You see, there is a significance to the story that the little fellow who is telling it doesn't seem to realize. It's a terribly important conclusion that I have drawn from what he has told me, but he doesn't seem to understand it at all—

Johnny Winstead, to give him credit, never really wanted to play hookey in the first place. He had already seen a circus once, and if he didn't get to see one this year, it wouldn't be too great a tragedy. But Harold, big, slow minded, easy going Harold, his buddy, had never seen a circus. Never in his whole life. And Harold was determined that he would see a circus this year, come what may.

If you knew Harold as Johnny knew him, you'd realize that Johnny just couldn't desert a pal at a time like this. You see, Harold's slowness would have gotten him into trouble in no time without Johnny there to watch over him and use his quick mind to sort of—well—explain things to anyone who might question them. So, when Johnny found that Harold had set his mind on playing hookey and going to the circus, come what may, Johnny was just duty-bound to play hookey too, and go along.

Now this circus wasn't in Bellevue,

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Mr. Harris dug along in a straight line, as if he had a plow . . . the boys dug right behind him.

Illustration by Ramon Raymond

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where Johnny and Harold lived. It was in Mason, about sixteen miles away, and you had to take a bus to get there. There were only three buses a day, one in the early morning, which took the men to work who lived in Bellevue and worked in Mason, another at noon and the third about six in the evening. They could have taken the noon bus, but it would have gotten them to Mason only half an hour before the circus began; and was there ever a boy who didn't want to wander about the circus grounds for an hour or two before the show began?

So Johnny planned it all as carefully as he could. The night before the circus, just before bedtime, he told Mrs. Meeker that he and Harold had been asked by their teacher to gather some wildflowers for painting class, that they had forgotten to do it, and that they would get up early in the morning and gather some before they went to school.

Mrs. Meeker (who was their foster mother, and who ran "Mrs. Meeker's Boarding Home for Orphan Boys") promised to have some breakfast on the table for them. They retired, secure in the belief that there'd be no trouble, at least until they got back from the circus the next evening. And that time, to their minds, was so far in the future that it wasn't worth bothering about at all.

They got up ever so early. Johnny didn't remember ever getting up so early before. He woke up Harold—and had a time of doing it, too. They ate their breakfast and crept out of the door as quietly as they could. They caught the bus and settled down in a seat and prepared to enjoy the ride. The bus hadn't gotten a mile out of town before they were sound asleep and catching up on the rest they'd lost by getting up so early.

They were awakened by a terrific bump. Johnny saw about a million stars and sat bolt upright and looked about him. Harold sat up, too, his eyes big with wonder and fright. They noticed that a couple of men were barking at the driver to be careful, three or four were craning their necks to see behind to find out what had caused the bump, and one woman squeaked under the impression that she was screaming dramatically. But the driver stoically continued on his way, his eyes peering out into the darkness ahead.

The darkness! That was surprising. When the boys had fallen asleep, it had already been dawn, the sun had just about been ready to rise. Evidently some thick clouds had come up while they slept, for it was pretty dark now. Maybe it was foggy, too, for the bus' headlights didn't seem to penetrate very far.

One of the men wanted to get out. He rang the bell and then peered out into the dark uncertainly. He shouted to the driver: "Next stop's Burton Road, isn't it?" The driver made no answer, and the bus kept on going. Presently the man cried out, indignantly: "Hey! I want to get out at Burton Road!"

The driver turned around slowly, one hand still on the wheel. "This is

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an express, Mister!" he said, coldly. "Nobody gets off till the end of the line."

Immediately a half dozen people arose to protest. "We get off at Borden's Plant," one of them said, angrily. "What do you want to do, make us late for work?" Another insisted that he *had* to get off at Seton Road. The driver brushed aside their objections.

"This is an express," he repeated, and then somberly: "This is the Last Express! It goes to the end of the line."

The objections of the people ended suddenly. With pale drawn faces, they went back and sat down in their seats. The bus sped on through the dark.

Harold and Johnny had watched this intercourse between the driver and the passengers without paying a particular amount of attention to it. *They* hadn't intended to get off until the end of the line, anyhow. The circus grounds were less than a quarter of a mile from the bus garage (which was in Mason), so it wouldn't be a bad idea, if the driver would let them, to stay on after the bus left the end of the line and turned into the garage. There they could get off and run over to the circus in less than a minute. So, secure in the knowledge that they, at least, couldn't be carried past *their* stop, they sat back in their seats and dozed, and presently they were asleep again.

When they awoke, the bus was empty. The people were gone, and the driver was gone and it still wasn't daylight. They peered out of the bus window. It dawned on them that they must be in the garage, for they could see a number of other busses and cars parked in a long row.

But after a moment, Johnny was aware that they were mistaken.

"This ain't the garage, Harold," he muttered. "We're out in the open! This looks like an old auto dump. Look at all the busted-up busses. Gosh, where are we, anyhow?"

Harold peered out of the car window and stifled a whimper.

"We ain't lost, are we?" he queried. "We can find the circus, can't we? Gosh, maybe this is what the driver meant when he said this was the last express. He must've meant it was the last trip the bus was ever going to make."

"Well," said Johnny. "We can't sit here wondering about that. Let's start looking for the circus grounds."

They left the bus and started off through the curious twilight. It should have been broad daylight by now, but strangely, it wasn't. Off in one part of the sky, which Johnny immediately decided was the east, the sky was very bright, but the sun hadn't risen yet, apparently. When they left the auto dump, they came to a road that ran east and west, and Johnny decided that they had better go west. He knew there was no auto dump on the road between Bellevue and Mason, so he figured that they had been carried past Mason, and now they would have to back track until they came to that town.

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So they started down the road, a little uncertain, but unable to decide on anything better to do. They walked and they walked down the road, with nothing to either side of them but ramshackle fences and moss-covered stone walls and untended fields and scraggly, dismal thickets.

The longer they walked, the darker it got, until at last they could barely see their way. They got more and more scared, they walked faster and faster in the hope of reaching Mason before the increasing darkness became complete. They ran and ran through the gloom. At last they were crying and stumbling along, all out of breath, and it was pitch dark.

After long moments of blind panic, they threw themselves down on the side of the road and tried to rest a few minutes. Their sobs quieted, their breathing slowed, and with the quick recuperation of youngsters, they were back to normal. After a little while a curious lethargy stole over them and they fell sound asleep.

Now, this is the amazing part—when they awoke, they were lying on the side of the road on the outskirts of Bellevue, not more than ten blocks from their home! The sun was shining brightly, high in the west, and the clock on the Presbyterian Church tower said 4:20.

So they got up and went back into town.

They had missed the circus somehow, they had missed the whole town of Mason, and here they were, back home, and it was almost supper time. There was a lump in Johnny's throat and Harold began to whimper in disappointment, but after that horrible trip back, it was a big relief to walk along the streets in the sun again.

They came to Mrs. Meeker's and stole in quietly. The other boys were just sitting down to supper, and Harold's and Johnny's seats were the only ones that were empty. They slipped into them and lowered their eyes while Mrs. Meeker said a quick grace. Then, before the boys could start the usual rush for the food, Mrs. Meeker rapped on the table with a spoon.

"Boys," she said, "I think, before we start eating, that I ought to say a little something about your former companions, Harold and Johnny. . ." She glanced at them as she said this, but her look was funny, as if she were looking right through them, and the other kids didn't even glance their way. Harold began to squirm, and Johnny felt a funny chill coming over him, for it began to be pretty plain that they were in for some novel kind of punishment for what they had done. What did she mean by calling them "former companions," for instance?

"I have set places for Johnny and Harold tonight," Mrs. Meeker went on. "For I wanted to talk to you about them, and tell you not to judge them too harshly, nor to look upon what happened to them as a punishment to your playmates. After tonight, you know, their places will not be set, and you will never see Johnny or Harold any more. Yet I think you will remember them always, because—" Mother Meeker choked and then she

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stopped talking and blew her nose and began to sob into her handkerchief.

Johnny and Harold felt awful. They got up and went over to Mrs. Meeker and tried to console her, but she *never noticed them!* It wasn't until a couple of the other kids came over and put *their* arms around her that she stopped crying. And never once did she even look at Johnny or Harold. Neither did any of the fellows. Then it was that it dawned on Johnny what their punishment was going to be. Nobody was going to pay any attention to them until they had somehow or other expiated their crime of playing hookey and going to the circus!

They didn't stay to eat any supper. They went up to their room and tried to talk it over. There wasn't much to say. Harold said: "I can't stand it, Johnny," and cried a little, and Johnny said: "You'll have to, Harold. We did a wrong thing and we got caught, and now we gotta take what's coming to us." They sat moodily on the bed for awhile, and Harold sniffled. Pretty soon he said: "Let's go over to the scout meeting, anyhow. There'll be some fellows over there that don't know about this. Maybe they'll talk to us."

Johnny had forgotten about the scout meeting, but he accepted the suggestion with alacrity. It would be something to do to make their punishment easier. They put on their neckerchiefs and caps (they couldn't afford entire uniforms), and started off for the church, in the basement of which the scout meetings were held. Nobody said goodbye to them, and Mrs. Meeker didn't even warn them to be home early, like she had always done before. Harold was sniffling again by the time they started up the street.

They entered the church basement, and most of the scouts were already there. They shouted "Hi, fellows," a little more boisterously than usual, and flung their caps on the pile with the others, ostentatiously. And—*nobody noticed them!* Johnny was a little pale as he stepped forward and slipped into one of the seats in the first row.

Mr. Shafer, the scoutmaster began to talk.

"Boys," he said, "this is one of the saddest meetings that we have ever had. Some people might try to point out the lessons that we can learn from this sad event, but I am in no mood for pointing out moral lessons. I know that our two former members, Johnny and Harold, were disobedient, but every healthy boy is, now and then. I would not have you feel that the terrible thing that has happened was a punishment for what they did, but I do want to show you that the scout's code is not a bunch of rules made up by adults to make things hard for you boys, but some things that are necessary to adhere to in order to get along in this world of ours in the proper way. Boys, this is a sad meeting, for we know that we'll never see Johnny and Harold any more, all because of that one little act of disobedience—"

His voice sort of trailed off, and he

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stopped talking. For almost a minute, the whole group was silent. Then the other boys began to talk in low tones among themselves and Johnny and Harold sat meekly and gulped back their tears. It was the same thing here that it had been at the boarding home!

They went up to Mr. Shafer and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't pay the slightest bit of attention to them. They tried to talk to some of the kids, but they were ignored most completely. Harold broke down and cried loudly, but nobody made any effort to comfort him. So at last they took up their caps and left the meeting.

They walked around to the back of the church and sat down on the bench under the old elm tree. Harold was still crying.

"They never done nothing like this before," he sobbed. "They never treated any of the other kids as mean as this."

"We gotta figure out some way to stop them from acting like this," Johnny decided. "We gotta figure out how to make them like us again." He buried his chin in his hands and sat for awhile, looking at the lights in the basement windows.

"We ran away to the circus," he said thoughtfully. "A scout is obedient. We got all dirty on that trip back home. A scout is neat. We fell asleep two or three times, and we were late for the meeting. A scout is alert, and prompt. It'll take a lot of work to straighten things out, Harold."

He sat back and thought some more, and Harold's sobbing turned back to sniffling and gradually ceased. At last Johnny spoke again.

"We ain't scouts no more, Harold," he explained. "You heard him call us 'former members.' But if we act like good scouts, maybe some day they'll take us back in. And maybe Mrs. Meeker'll take us back in, too. So that's what we'll do, Harold. We'll just have to act like good scouts until they, uh—forgive us, like."

He thought some more.

"We can live in the kids' shack up on Prospect hill. And we'll come down town every day and do good turns. And we'll attend every one of the scouts' meetings, only we'll just sit in the back and say nothing. And then, some day they'll let us join up again. You just wait and see, Harold. They'll let us join up again."

So they decided that that was what they would do, and they started for Prospect Hill, where their gang had their shack, for it was getting late and they couldn't do much more, this night. They left the street and started up the path to the top of the hill, and after a while they noticed several other kids, climbing up the hill but avoiding the path.

"Who're those guys?" whispered Harold. "What're they climbing up through the weeds for?"

"I don't know who they are," confessed Johnny. "They ain't none of our gang, though, so I don't think they're up to much good."

After they had walked a little further, Harold said, "Look, there's

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Tobe Sutley."

Johnny looked, and sure enough, there was the leader of that tough gang from down by the creek. That made him peer closer and he noticed several more boys whom he could identify as members of the Clark Street gang.

"Hey, they ain't got no business up on Prospect Hill," whispered Harold, excitedly. "That's *our* gang's hang-out."

"They're up to something, that's a cinch," said Johnny. "We better follow them and see what they do."

So they took out after the stealthy fellows, and their path led them right to the top of the hill. As the Clark Street gang got close to the top, they began pulling up armfuls of dry weeds, and when they got to the top, they threw the weeds down against the walls of the shack that Johnny and his friends had gone to such trouble to build, a month or so before. Suddenly Johnny saw plainly what they were going to do.

As if to verify his realization, Tobe Sutley suddenly whispered, hoarsely: "Now, you fellows chase around and get some more brush, while I see if I can get a fire started."

"They're going to burn down the shack, Harold," cried Johnny, forgetful of the need for silence. "Come on, we got to stop them." He rushed forward, shouting, "Get away from that shack, you darned fools. What do you thing you're doing?"

He ran right out from under the protection of the trees, to where you could easily see him in the light of the dying day—but the Clark Streeters didn't even notice him. Like the boys at Mrs. Meeker's, like the members of their troop, the Clark Streeters ignored them, and kept right on gathering up dry weeds to add to the pile by the shack.

Johnny was blind with rage. "I'll bet you'll notice this!" he cried, and snatching up a broken branch of a tree, he began laying it across the backs of the boys nearest to him.

They noticed *that*, I'll tell you. The first fellow he hit gave a yelp of surprise and whirled around with an oath. He acted as if he didn't see Johnny at all, but he did see the fellow whom Johnny hit next, and who was just then rearing up from a terrific whack across the seat. They looked at each other for about as long as it would take you to take a deep breath, and then they lit into each other as if each though the other had been the aggressor. Johnny bounded away from them and began to whack at others of the gang.

Now Harold decided to take a hand. Harold, you'll remember, was bigger and slower than Johnny, and it took him a little while to get started, but once he started, his size told. Harold waded in with his fists.

You never saw a gang of reputedly tough kids act so funny. They kept right on acting as if they didn't see Harold or Johnny, either one. Several of them, when they got hit, acted like they were scared out of a year's growth. And the ones that didn't act scared seemed to think that one of their own gang had hit them. And

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after a few minutes, a snarling, bawling gang of rowdies turned tail and began plunging down the hill as if the top of the hill was haunted and a gang of ghosts were after them. And Johnny and Harold stood on the hill and laughed for the first time since they had taken the bus, early that morning.

"I guess that's our good deed for today," chuckled Johnny, at last. "We sure saved the kids' shack for 'em. Maybe they won't let us be members of the troop any more, but they sure ought to be glad for what we did for them."

They sat back and talked about the fight for awhile, and then they got tired and so they went into the shack and lay down and went to sleep.

Whenever a cartoonist draws a picture of a boy scout doing a good deed, he pictures him helping an old lady across the street. Whenever somebody is writing about boy scouts' good deeds, they always seem to think that they consist mostly of helping old ladies across the street. This is silly, of course, but that is probably the reason that, next day, when Johnny and Harold started down to the town center to see what good deeds they could do for the day, there was a sort of vague idea in the back of their minds that they might be able to spend the day helping old ladies across the street.

And, sure enough, right in front of the court house, was old Mrs. Blakeslee, near sighted as an owl in the day time, getting ready to fumble her way across Main Street. They might not have done anything about it, for Mrs. Blakeslee had managed pretty well by herself for a good many years, but just as they drew near to her and she stepped off the curb, there came a great big truck swinging out of North Street and bearing right down on her.

They hardly had time to think. Johnny rushed out and grabbed Mrs. Blakeslee and rushed her on across the street. Harold, without even thinking, jumped out in front of the truck and tried to push it back. And he did! The truck squeaked and protested, but it stopped dead in its tracks, backed up a yard or so, and stood there with its rear wheels spinning and grinding into the dirt, until Harold let it go. Then it was on its way, with its white-faced, swearing driver staring back through the rear-view mirror as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

And little Mrs. Blakeslee squealed once and then leaned against a fire hydrant as if she were very much out of breath.

"How did I do that?" queried Harold as Johnny rejoined him. "Did you see what I did, Johnny? How did I do that?"

"Gosh!" muttered Johnny. "Gosh, Harold, I don't know. You must be stronger than you think. But if you're that strong, it ought to help us when we start doing good turns for people, oughtn't it?"

Harold, who was seldom praised for the things he did, puffed up like a pouter pigeon. "I'll do other things, too. Just you wait and see."

They walked along, enthusiasm

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high as a result of their first success, and their eyes were alert to see if there was anything else they could do to help people. And that was how they managed to spy old Mr. Harris, digging in his orchard.

Mr. Harris was an old bachelor. He had inherited an awful lot of land, back in the early part of the century, but the depression and ill health and other things too numerous to mention had caused his fortune to dwindle until now all that he had was this house with about an acre of ground in the back, and rheumatism. He kept himself alive by raising garden truck, and he lived on what he raised, and what meat the neighbors brought him. He was over seventy; and there he was, rheumatism and all, trying to dig up the ground for his garden. Johnny looked at Harold, and they grinned and went back to where he was digging.

There were a couple of extra spades in the little shed against the house and Johnny and Harold took them up and began to dig, behind Mr. Harris. He dug along in a straight line, as if he had a plow, and they dug along, too, each digging a line behind and to the right of him. When he had dug all the way down to the fence and looked back to see how much he had accomplished, his eyes were a sight to behold. He pushed back his old hat and scratched his head, and his eyes almost popped out. Then, after a moment or two, he shrugged and started to dig again.

If you had been on a bench outside of the post office that evening, where Mr. Harris often sat and talked with other old-timers, you'd have noticed a most wonderful change in him. He had a look on his face that was almost youthful.

"Spaded up me garden this mornin', I did," he announced, impressively. "Did a darn good job of it, too. Guess I musta just felt like workin', 'cause I never did see a job go off as smooth as that'n. Had the whole thing spaded up by 'leven o'clock. Ain't done so much nor felt so chipper for fifteen year. Guess there's life in the old dog yet, fellers."

Johnny and Harold would have liked to have heard him, I'm sure, but they were halfway across town, just then, doing another good deed.

There was a fellow down at the YMCA named Charley Windhorst. Charley was a bully, not from any inherent streak of meanness, but simply because he had never been beaten. He was just about the toughest fighter in town, and nobody would ever have tried to box him at the Y if it hadn't been for his habit of challenging somebody and then making his life a misery for him until he accepted the challenge. Last week he had challenged Burt Slater and Burt had accepted, realizing that the only way to get Charley to leave him alone was to take his drubbing and get it over with.

So here were Johnny and Harold, at the Y, secure in the knowledge that nobody would pay them the slightest bit of attention if Harold stepped into the ring and helped Burt with a poke or two now and

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then.

That was just what they did, and after two rounds, Charley went down with an extra hard clip to the jaw which Harold gave him. When the two left the Y, Charley was clasping the hand of Burt Slater, and swearing eternal friendship, and the fellows around the ring were cheering *Charley* and saying that he was the best loser they ever watched. Johnny and Harold were chalking up one more good deed for the day.

Now that, in brief, tells the story that the boy scout in my dream has been telling to me. I've pieced it together from five or six dreams, but I'm pretty sure the sequence is about right. The first five or six dreams I had didn't mean very much to me; but then, one day, I was down at Schneider's grocery and I heard Mrs. Blakeslee reciting, probably for the fortieth time, her miraculous escape from being run down by a truck. The neighbor she was telling it to laughed wisely. "I guess Johnny Goodturn had you in tow," she said. "That musta been his good turn for the day."

That name startled me, and I stepped up and began to question the woman. Well, it turned out that there's a sort of legend springing up in Bellevue, a legend of a ghostly boy scout who goes about town doing good deeds of the sort that you'd expect a boy scout to do. I made a quiet investigation, and the more I found out, the more disturbed I got. I've got a list of a couple of dozen deeds that have occurred in town recently that are awfully hard to explain. For instance, old Mr. Harris has done more work in his garden this year than any two healthy men could be expected to do. And there's the miracle of Mrs. Kemp's house-cleaning, which did itself in a single night. And then there were the shoes which rich Clara Salter threw away in spite of the fact that they were almost new, and which miraculously appeared on the feet of little Nancy Andrews, halfway across town, who hadn't had a new pair of shoes for a year.

Just the other day I was caught down town with only a dime in my pocket, and the bus fare back home is fifteen cents. Now I am willing to swear that I had spent every cent except that dime, but when I felt in my pocket, there was a nickle with it, and I was spared a long and tiring walk.

It wasn't until I checked up on these things that I began to worry. You see, I guessed right away what had happened. I saw that Johnny didn't understand things at all. That is the reason I said I was worried when I started this story, and that is the reason I'm writing this.

I've learned all I could about Johnny Goodturn—and about Johnny Winstead, too. I know how he used to go down to Grady's drug store and read certain magazines, and I'm hoping he still does. If he reads this story, as I'm pretty sure he will, I've got this to say to him:

Johnny, there was a bus accident on the road from Bellevue to Mason last month. It was a terrible accident, and seventeen grown-ups and two boys were killed instantly. Now I know

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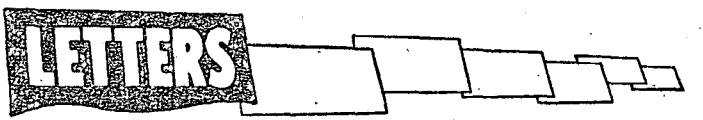
this will be a terrible shock to you but—*you and Harold were the boys.* If only you hadn't been asleep when the bus got to the end of the line, I expect you'd have found out about it then. But somehow you were overlooked and so you found your way back to Bellevue.

Bellevue needs you and your good turns, Johnny, but it isn't fair to keep you. Nobody wants to punish you, and nobody wants to keep you from your beloved scouts. But you've been transferred to another troop, and you must take your place in that heavenly scout troop, where your membership is in good standing and only awaiting your arrival.

Somehow I feel that, once you've learned this, you'll leave Bellevue and find your way to your new home. And—I hope that some day I'll be seeing you, and Harold, too.

So long, fellows.

THE END



George R. Hoover

I have been reading your magazine for some time and I certainly enjoy most of the stories and features. The only fault I can see with the magazine is that there are no illustrations by Cartier who is, in my opinion, the best in the field.

In the Letters Department in the September issue I read the letter from Allen Newton regarding the picture in THE GAMIN and your answer stating you would send him one if he wanted it. I didn't think it would be possible to get one or I would have written you as soon as I bought the issue. If it is at all possible for you to send me a copy of this picture I would be very grateful.

424 Harmon Avenue
Danville, Illinois

Here's good news for you: Cartier is doing an illustration for us right now, and he'll be doing more.

Regarding illustrations, we have only one original of each, naturally, and most are not available since we send them to the yearly science fiction convention, where they are auctioned off to provide funds to finance the convention.—RAP

Sid Herman

I have been reading OW since the first ish and am of the opinion that it is one of the best on the market. What really won me was the fourth ish—*Dear Devil* and *War of Nerves* were terif. The trilogy *Colossus,* second of a trilogy you say, was excellent.

For once I agree with Shelby Vick—get a Brown story and try and use staples on the seventh ish.

In this (the sixth) ish I liked *Colossus III* and *Palace of Darkness* the best although *Little Miss Ignorance* and *Automaton* were not bad. The two shorts were okay and *Mr. G and the Lepra-Cohen* was readable but . . . I do not want to start a feud, but why did you print *Forget-Me-Not?* It was the only real stinker in the book. Back to good points: 1—I like *News of the Month;* 2—Your editorials are among the best I've ever read; 3—*Letters* section is good but why not enlarge it?

That's all except for one thing — NO Shaver stories, please.

1 Sickles St.
New York, N. Y.

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We have two Frederic Brown stories on hand now. That ought to answer your plea for Brown satisfactorily.—RAP

Curtis Anderson

Congratulations on the way OW is improving from issue to issue. I hope that its resurgence will continue as you come out oftener. I missed the first three issues but have enjoyed the magazine ever since. Incidentally, I did not discover the world of science-fiction until 1947. Since then I have spent much of my spare time haunting old book stores and digging through piles of dusty tomes trying to get old issues of stf mags. No doubt many other readers started their collections the same way. It's been quite a task trying to keep up with all the new material plus what I've accumulated from past years, but it's been a lot of fun, too.

In your September issue *Little Miss Ignorance* was tops. I've always been a sucker for a robot story and this was a good one. Somewhat reminiscent of Lester del Rey's *Helen O'Loy*, this story had more character and human element than most of the older gadget-type tales. I like a good space opera as well as anyone, I guess, but I prefer the wistful, tender, ironic type of story which seems to be appearing more often all the time. Your own *Dear Devil* was a good example, and aSF has had several in the past year or so.

Second was *Forget-Me-Not*. Nothing particularly earth-shaking but it was nicely done. Give van Vogt's story third. He can usually come up with a good story, although this is far from what he can do if he takes his time. *Palace of Darkness* was fourth. *Mr. Garfinkel* was not science-fiction at all, but I placed it above *Colossus III* because Byrne's wilderness of words was almost unreadable. The shorts are too short to even rate.

Now for a few requests: stories by Heinlein, del Rey, de Camp, Asimov, Sturgeon and Williamson; covers by Rogers and Bonestell and a story rating somewhat like the Analythical Lab is aSF. How about a stf poetry section or a crossword puzzle?

All in all, I like your little book and I wish you a long and successful career.

1000 3rd Ave. N.E.
Minneapolis, Minn.

We already have del Rey in the house, and Theodore Sturgeon. Don't worry, we'll get the rest of them too. We also have a sequel to LITTLE MISS IGNORANCE on tap. And as soon as we get more physical strength from our accident, we'll be adding some of those other features you mention.—RAP

Robyn LeRoy

Have read and enjoyed fantasy and science-fiction since the days Hugo Gernsback was trying to be a one-man industry. And therefore have plagued many an editor with letters of no particular point (and usually to no avail).

I believe your own astute logic has consigned more than one of my letters to the waste basket . . . in the era of ". . . do YOU believe in the caves???"

At the time I culled my book-larnin' to pick out and point-up the very large holes in the Shaverian "logic," starting from the racial-memory thesis and finally, when the Sharpe lad became too lecherously inane, I just quit buying the magazines altogether. (Matter-of-fact, 'tho I buy every other mag of the type, every issue, I still can't work the bad taste out of my mouth enough to more than look over the cover of the pair in mention. And I think Browne is an especially nice guy, too!) However, I gather that one of them (Fantastic, I believe) has an opus by L. Ron Hubbard coming up, so I'll probably give in and buy it.

Personally, I feel your editorial attitude is about the finest I've read in print yet. I'm quite a booster in that regard.

Admittedly, I go heavy for the pseudo-psychological theme, so some of the material you select for the mag is just not my style. But not being a writer, I can't criticize merely because it doesn't put enough sugar on my strawberries. Being not the omniscient brain either, I can hardly afford to "rate" the stories . . . just take it for granite that if I'm not throwing stones everything's fine as sand.

Be therefore flattered that I'm writing a missive and not a missile, and have courage, it's not often that I write at all.

More luck to you, RAP . . . you're looking good now and as I said before, I feel not too far from typical, so maybe the major portion of your readers who haven't voiced themselves DO favor your type of editorship.

1504 Grove Avenue
Richmond 20, Va.

(Continued on page 158)

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Do Unseen Powers Direct Our Lives?

ARE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

Have You Had These Experiences?

. . . that unmistakable feeling that you have taken the wrong course of action, that you have violated some inner, unexpressed, better judgment? The sudden realization that the silent whisperings of self are cautioning you to keep your own counsel — not to speak words on the tip of your tongue in the presence of another. That something which pushes you forward when you hesitate, or restrains you when you are apt to make a wrong move.

These urges are the subtle *influence* which when understood and directed has made thousands of men and women masters of their lives. There IS a source of intelligence within you as natural as your senses of sight and hearing, and more dependable, which you are NOT using now! Challenge this statement! Dare the Rosicrucians to reveal the functions of this Cosmic mind and its great possibilities to you.

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Take this infinite power into your partnership. You can use it in a rational and practical way without interference with your religious beliefs or personal affairs. The Rosicrucians, a world-wide philosophical movement, *invite* you to use the coupon below, now, today, and obtain a free copy of the fascinating book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains further.

Scribe W.V.Y.
THE ROSICRUCIANS, AMORC
San Jose, California

I am sincerely interested in knowing more about this unseen, vital power which can be used in acquiring the fullness and happiness of life. Please send me, without cost, the book, "The Mastery of Life," which tells how to receive this information.

Name.....

Address.....

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)

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In all fairness to Shaver, we ought to inform you that practically all of the "illogical points" in his stories were insertions by yours truly. Shaver himself remonstrated with us when we put them in, and maybe that was our real mistake. We want to take the blame for the things you mention, such as racial memory.

We've got some psychological stuff coming up that will practically bury your strawberries in sugar!—RAP

Vernell Coriell

Only a fan could have published a magazine like OW. It is a fan's "dream magazine" come true. I like your ideas and your "no policy" policy. If your new magazine IMAGINATION is only half as good your future as a publisher is in the bag.

The news that Bok will do cover work for you is wonderful, and the fact that you have given Bok a free hand should make the pictures real collectors' items.

As for the suggestion for back covers, how about a series of paintings on famous fantasy stories? You have St. John, and he could do a pic illustrating one of the famous Burroughs stories. Bok could do a series on the Merritt classics, Settles could illustrate Wells, Mac a pic of Haggard's SHE, etc.

Why not contact John Coleman Burroughs and purchase his recently completed fantastic novel? Perhaps you could get him to do a cover for you also.

And how about binders for each volume of OTHER WORLDS?

Box 652
Pekin, Illinois

Did it ever occur to you that a "fan" is a person who loves science fiction? That's why you say OW is a fan's dream come true—it's a real science fiction magazine, put out by a lover of science fiction. OW is intended to hit the spot with the true enthusiast, the fellow who made science fiction what it is today by his support twenty-five years ago. It should prove to everybody that "fans" are not "out of the ordinary" people, but actually the TRUE science fiction reader. Binders? We wonder if there is a group of OW fans who would like to have OW bound in book form as we do FATE, which costs $4.00 per volume? We'd do it if the demand warranted it.—RAP

James Evans

I've read every issue of OW so far and can't refrain any longer from congratulating you. My reasons are as follows: when I started reading stf pulp about six or seven years ago I waded through every story no matter how crumby it was out of sheer curiosity. Well, that curiosity soon waned and I began to glance at the blurb and perhaps the first couple of pages of at least half the yarns and then discard them as old stuff whose burden I could predict infallibly and whose execution appealed not at all. It began to cost money to buy enough mags to find a few decent stories, enough to satisfy my yen for the stuff. That staleness applies even to aSF although a little less than to most of the others.

Now to the point; I've been able to read every single one of your stories the last two issues. To the general public that means nothing, but to me it's practically a miracle. I actually save money on your mag despite the rather snooty price you hold us up for. Cover to cover I read this last issue and that with scarcely a break. You ought to call it Out of This World like the funny book just out.

Well, I'd better hasten to maul some of the stories before I leave. Van Vogt's story was fair but written uninspiringly. The Temple story was the most entertaining one in the issue to me. Does he hate faith in things or something? Most disillusioning to the young mind. Old colossal Byrne wound up with a bang. He writes sloppily and jumps from macrocosmos to trivia without even shifting gears, but that story just about exhausts the possibilities of dealing with the Earth on a grand scale. I enjoyed all fifty million words of it in the same way some of Haggard's things struck me.

4803 Duval Street
Austin, Texas

Byrne, we agree, slings those words around, but doesn't he sling that imagination around too? He'll be delighted to be compared to Haggard.—RAP

Catherine Butler

That certainly was a beautiful cover on the September OW. Your magazine is going places, I hope IMAGINATION does as well.

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Now for a few suggestions:

1. Keep the vignettes, they're very good. *Amazing* treats them as fillers while you treat them as stories with as much value as the lead novel. Naturally, yours are better.

2. Have Rog Phillips hurry up with that sequel to the Stanwoody Cripe story in your first issue. Make this a series.

3. Get something from Ross Rocklynne.

4. Get a lead novel from Margaret St. Clair.

5. If OW can't do it, give us more fantasy in IMAGINATION. And speaking of fantasy, I miss the old werewolf and vampire stories that used to be published in Farnsworth Wright's days. Give us a few of these.

About the stories: First place to Tanner for *Mr. Garfinkel.* Very cute. Second place to *Palace of Darkness.* This was even better than the first one he did for you. Third place to *Forget-Me-Not.* This was poor for Temple, but good anyway. *The Mute Question,* fourth; *Automaton,* fifth; *Colossus III,* sixth; *The Swordsmen of Varnis,* seventh; and *Little Miss Ignorance,* eighth. This last one was a complete dud; it was merely a series of incidents, not a story. Please don't *ever* publish anything like that again. I didn't think that OW could publish anything so terrible, but . . .

The three best illos in the whole mag were: 1 *Forget-Me-Not,* by Smith; 2 *Mr. Garfinkel,* by Terry; and 3 *The Mute Question,* by Bill Kroll. Here again I agree with Varady. Your illustrations lack style.

917½ West 77th
Los Angeles, Calif.

Wait'll you see some of the covers coming up! And you get your wish about Stanwoody Cripe. Ross Rocklynne has a cover story in the third IMAGINATION! It's a fantasy. And as for werewolves and vampires, we've got something coming up that will put you in a tizzy of delight.
—RAP

Yvonne K. Worth

I like your magazine, I like it very much. So much that I have written to you the very first letter to any magazine. I found my first copy of OW today, and I'm glad to say that it won't be my last. In the September issue *Little Miss Ignorance* was really terrific, and A. E. Van Vogt's *Automaton* was just as great.

But the thing that really made me like OW most was the readers' letters and your answers. I'm getting so that that's the first thing I read. The letter from Shelby Vick asking you to get a story by Fredric Brown was a wonderful suggestion. He's my favorite too. And the wonderful way you take the readers' letters and suggestions to heart (as I suppose you do by your answers) is a much needed thing in any magazine today.

One thing I find very amusing is the way most of the readers down *Amazing* and *Wonder Stories.* I've never thought much of pulp magazines and I still don't. I can't stand the cheap over-sexy art work or the horrible ads found near the back, but once in a while there's one or possibly two good stories in it—but only too often there are none.

I predict that within a year your magazine will be rated along with aSF and that for my dough is tops. As a fact, it'll probably be much better because it doesn't have those horrible little articles that don't make much sense (or tell us in a big, bold manner what we already know) and take up a lot of room.

OW is truly a science-fiction magazine without a bunch of facts thrown in. One letter I read (from one of the magazines that have these articles) asked that they be taken out or limited so more space could be allotted to stories. The editor's answer (which I considered somewhat of an insult) was that the articles were there to enlighten the readers so that they'd know that a lot of the stories were based on some fact and that today's fiction could well be tomorrow's fact. Now please, anyone who reads science-fiction as a regular reading diet well knows this and understands it, otherwise they'd be reading detective stories or love stories. So you can now see why I really enjoy your mag so much.

Could I put in my two cents for a suggestion too? Make your personals more attractive by indenting each new item instead of running them together. They'd be much easier to read and nicer looking, too.

Mostly, I like your art work and the illustrations for book ads are terrific. By the way, do you charge for personals?

1110 N. Cooper Ave.
Colorado Springs, Colo.

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No, we don't charge for personals, and we'll try to dress the department up a bit for you.—RAP

Robert E. Briney

Well, well, you're really going places. First you get the jump on Simon and Shuster by printing the last chapter of a van Vogt novel before the book is released; then you print *Way in the Middle of the Air by* Bradbury beating out Doubleday who reprinted the tale in *The Martian Chronicles.*

In regard to the May, July and September issues of Our Wonderful OTHER WORLDS, I can say truthfully that I've never seen three consecutive issues of any magazine (excepting aSF) maintain the consistently high quality evidenced in these issues. *Colossus* was of course the mainstay of all three issues; it is a magnificent epic, *even* better than *Prometheus II.* When cometh *The Golden Guardsmen* novel? It was relatively easy to tell where you cut *Colossus*—one of the places at least. Just out of curiosity, what adventures befell Janice as a result of her taking the miser's stone from the Elder treasure? The fact that she did so was rather played up in the story, yet no more was said about the stone.

I had never heard of *Martin Brand* before I saw the story in the July issue, but I thank you heartily for bringing him back. This story goes down in my book as top favorite.

Michael Varady's letter in the September issue interested me by his remarks about Shaver. He says that if Shaver would write under a pen-name and prove his worth fans might not be scared away by his by-line on a story. As most fans seem to be aware, this has already happened. *Sons of the Serpent* seemed to be generally well liked and (so everyone says) it was written by Shaver. The pen-name is logical, anyway: Wes Amherst—Amherst, Wis. (where Shaver lives). Also, *Pillars of Delight* in *Amazing* was generally praised, while again, Stan Raycraft is said to be a pen-name for Shaver. I'm not certain that these two stories were written by Shaver, but I think they were.

So OW is even printing stories from fanzines, now? Better and better. There are many fan stories worthy of a wider audience than they get in the amateur publications. *Swordsmen of Varnis* from SLANT is about as good as any of the other shorts in the September issue.

As of now OW is my second favorite magazine of original stf and fantasy. If you keep on improving at the rate you've been going, you might even be the leading magazine someday.

Hooray for Bok and St. John covers! And McCauley! Let us hope that the new IMAGINATION and the increased frequency of publication do not impair in any way the high quality of OW. I've a feeling that it won't, though.

561 W. Western
Muskegon, Mich.

One of the things we are going to continue to do is get the jump on others. We have been developing a lot of very good contacts, of course, but largely it is a matter of "nosing around" and getting on the inside on new developments. It was no accident that we got those scoops. It was due to some darn nice friendship on the part of the authors, and on our "policy" which leads authors to believe that we will do things other editors will sneer at, or simply be afraid to risk because it is "too far off the trail." For instance, we had a long talk with del Rey about taboos. Said del Rey, what about stories with "God" in them as a real character, in which a few religious toes might be stepped on? Well, here's our viewpoint — this is a science fiction magazine, not the Bible, or a missal. Let the religious read their books, and let science fiction fans read theirs. We don't complain when the Bible disagrees with our stories of pre-adamic times, so why should Bible readers complain if we accept God into our book as they do in theirs? And since when is God "objectionable" to ANYONE?

We have indeed been pleased with the way the Colossus *trilogy was received.* Golden Guardsmen *will be coming at you soon, and here we can say confidently, that you will read a story you will never forget. Byrne has got that mysterious something that makes us say "magnificent," "epic" and "wow!" As for the miser's stone, that never did come out even in the uncut*

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version. Maybe Byrne has a separate story in mind.

And now we come to perhaps the most controversial subject ever to come into science fiction — Mr. Shaver. You and Michael Varady have brought up a point that your editor believes worthy of a little discussion.

Why, to begin, should we have any "policy" about using Mr. Shaver's real name or a pen name on a story? The idea seems to be that some fans get "hot under the collar" when they see the name, and actually refuse to read the story, or even to buy the magazine. This is undoubtedly true in some cases. The question here is whether they wouldn't get just as hot or hotter if they knew they were being "tricked" into reading the very man they don't want to read? The answer is yes, but the point is, the story is the thing. We all read science fiction stories, not science fiction authors. So it really makes no difference what name heads the story, except in cases where it is well known that a certain name is a guarantee of a good story. We use those names on the cover to sell magazines. Right there we are "dodging the issue" as editors, because we can tell you truthfully that no name ever sold more additional copies of an issue than did that of Richard S. Shaver (in our experience). Then why shouldn't we take advantage of that? After all, OTHER WORLDS can use additional money, and could give the readers even more for their money thereby. Well, the truth is, we've been asked by many of our readers who write in not to use the name. We complied. We sacrificed the commercial angle for their sake. We started this magazine with the pledge that we'd never cram anything down your throats just to make a few filthy dollars.

But it is becoming increasingly evident that our fans who object to the use of the name Shaver are worried because they have heard it expressed often that "I won't buy an issue with Shaver in it" so they worry about OW losing a sale. The reader who requests us to avoid the use of the name, even if we resorted to pen names, actually doesn't mind Shaver's name himself. Isn't this a peculiar state of affairs? Readers who are really afraid we won't be successful and want to make sure we don't "lose a sale!" We sure appreciate readers like that!

But now we come to it: certain stories prove popular, but it is rumored they are by Shaver. The result is, those same letter writers flock to his support and say "if he wrote those yarns, why not use his name?"

The answer may astound you — he doesn't want his name used! He only wants to prove to himself that he can write a true science fiction story. He says, "It was the Mystery that sold those extra copies of Amazing. *It wasn't my name. It never was. The proof is in the eating. My straight science fiction has never set any three-alarm fires, but at the same time, it has never gotten me "hung" because it stunk. My ambition is to write good science fiction and readers' praise will be balm to my soul. Varady is wrong — readers never were scared by my name, only by the Mystery. I am sure that if my straight science fiction was run under my own name, even those who hate my guts for the Mystery would be the first to praise me for a yarn they liked. It's all so much hogwash that science fiction readers can't judge a story by its merits rather than by their emotions. It is my opinion that the readers of OTHER WORLDS will be too smart to be fooled by a pen name, and that when they read a story they like, they'll praise it, knowing the by-line is a phony."*

Well, what can we say to that? The readers admit they have no objection to the name, that they enjoy good science fiction, no matter by whom it is written, and Shaver himself says we, as editors, are only living in a fool's paradise if we think we can fool the readers about who really wrote the story.

It really makes no difference. The point is, we've got to run the stories under the name the author asks us to. So we aren't trying to fool anyone. The truth is, Shaver has fooled most of you quite effectively. It would take a wizard to list all of his pen names, since 1945 to today — and some of the really fine stories of those five years would have appeared under the name of Shaver, if we, as editors of Amazing, *hadn't decided to keep his mystery separate from his other material.*

How many of our readers would like Shaver himself to give us a list of his pen names, so you can see for yourself just how matters stand?—RAP

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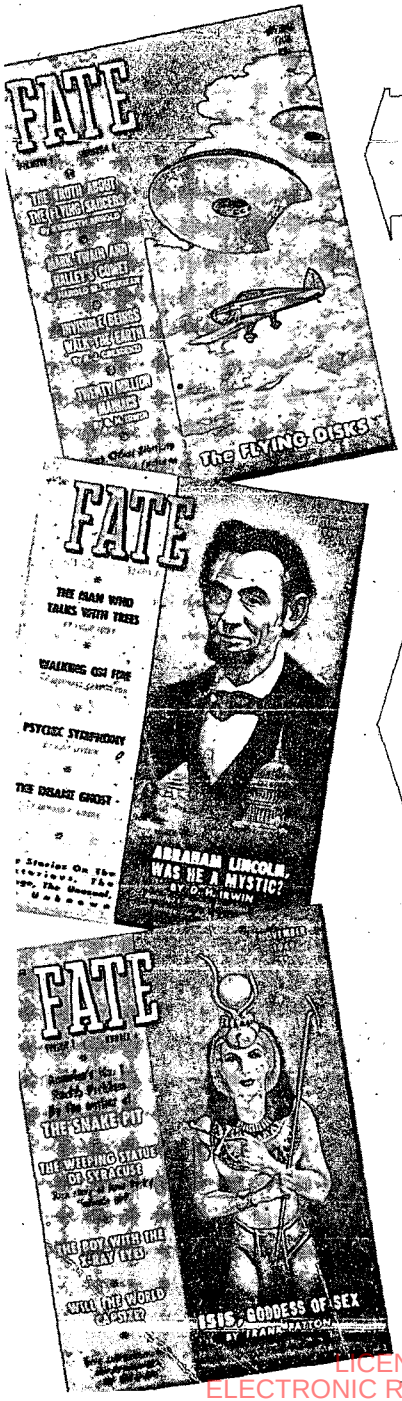

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